

WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO ART HISTORY



A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework

Edited by Jane Chin Davidson and Amelia Jones



WILEY Blackwell

A Companion to Contemporary Art
in a Global Framework

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Series Editor's Preface

Wiley Blackwell's *Companions to Art History* is a series of edited collections designed to cover the discipline of art history in all its complexities. Each volume is edited by specialists who lead a team of essayists, representing the best of leading scholarship, in mapping the state of research within the sub-field under review, as well as pointing toward future trends in research.

A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework offers an innovative and insightful consideration of the ways specialists and institutions in the fine arts, curation, cultural studies, and art history have attempted to situate art in a more globalized framework since the 1980s. The chapters combine to show the ways in which we can revise established Western definitions of 'art' in order to conceptualize it as a global phenomenon.

The volume is divided into three sections, with the first reviewing the history of the visual arts since 1980 alongside introducing new ways of thinking that seek to place contemporary art in a global framework. The second section traces the progression of recent developments in the art world, focusing on the historical and cultural contexts surrounding efforts to globalize the frames through which both the art world and the visual arts are conceived. The final section addresses a wide range of key themes, such as the fundamental institutions and ontologies of art practice, as well as the interactions among art, politics, and the public sphere. Together, these essays combine to provide a novel and thought-provoking revision of our conception and understanding of contemporary art in a global framework that will be essential reading for students, researchers and teachers working on the history, theory and practice of contemporary art.

A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework is a very welcome and timely addition to the series.

Dana Arnold, 2023

About the Editors

Jane Chin Davidson is an art historian who researches transnationalism, Chinese identity, feminism/eco-feminism, performance/performativity, and global exhibitions of contemporary art as Professor of Art History/Global Cultures at California State University, San Bernardino. Author of the monograph *Staging Art and Chineseness: Politics of Trans/Nationalism and Global Expositions* (2020) and co-editor of *Global and World Art in the Practice of the University Museum* (2017) and of a special journal issue “Okwui Enwezor: the Art of Curating,” *NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art* (May 2021), she has served on three editorial boards including *Art Journal* (2017–2021). Her professional awards include her stint as 2022 Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Loughborough University.

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Editors' Acknowledgments

The editors of this volume have a long history of working together and it is tribute to the power and perseverance of those supporting us (and of course of us supporting each other) that we pulled off this very complicated project mostly over the period of COVID-19 lockdowns. We can safely say working on this book was an energizing way to conquer some of the alienation and fragmentation of that moment. And our housemates, family, and friends were essential throughout (Paul and David, what can we say?). To the contributors, of course we owe everything for their patience and hard work in dealing with long editorial back and forths. The results speak for themselves and we thank you profusely for taking the leap with us in producing this radically different kind of book on contemporary art. We are honored to feature your work in this volume. Finally, we thank the unwavering support of Wiley Blackwell editors Catriona King and Rachel Greenberg, and the various managing editors who did the hard work of getting the volume out.

INTRODUCTION

The Eurocentrism of Contemporary Art, Staging the Project

Jane Chin Davidson and Amelia Jones

A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework is designed to provide a cultural, political, social, and aesthetic history of post-1980 visual arts in a global framework. The book is intended for students and specialists but also for any reader interested in what art *is* and what it *does* in and beyond the Euro-American (shorthand for European and North American—so-called Western) context. By the term “global framework,” the book points to the necessity of moving beyond the Euro-American canons of art and artists while recognizing the structurally European bases for what we call art and its institutions. That is, the book does not claim global coverage but, rather, offers a wide range of perspectives by curators, artists, art historians, performance studies scholars, and others on art since 1980 both within and beyond the Western context.

This aspect of the project bears reiteration: the book covers art since 1980 in a global framework; it does *not* claim global coverage. Through this title (with the word “framework,” which indicates our awareness of our North American point of view and anglophone scholarship as well as our interest in expanding outwards), and the project of the book itself, the editors point to the impossibility of comprehensive coverage promised by the term “global art” (the users of which routinely fail to acknowledge the European colonialist bases of both “art” and claims for its “global” or comprehensive reach). We start here, then, by acknowledging the impossibility of getting completely “beyond” or “outside of” the frameworks of the history of European colonialism, begun in the fifteenth century, and the subsequent ideology of European Enlightenment, the body of philosophy, thinking, and making that both identified and justified European dominance over colonized others—and that did so through (among other things) mobilizing a particular idea of “art” that is now inextricably bound to the “global” art complex. (By art complex we mean to refer to the intersecting discourses, institutions, and practices connected to art per se—from art schools, art galleries, and art museums to art history, art criticism, and art collecting—always already implicated in colonialism and related developments of capitalism, industrialism, nationalism, and imperialism.)

In this way, we insist in this book that what is called “global” is in fact still thoroughly structured and defined by European (cum Euro-American) concepts, beliefs, and value

systems. Just as the art world is attached to Euro-American modern ideas of the individual as a centered and intentional subject of making and knowing, so the “contemporary” as such is intimately connected to Euro-American concepts of contemporaneity and cosmopolitanism (Preziosi and Farago). At its most problematic, the cosmopolitanism that motors the international art complex is not acknowledged to be intimately connected to European modernity; it operates as a kind of universalism, assigning value to art in relation to its relative “sophistication.” The contemporary art complex pivots around this kind of covertly Eurocentric value system and so this kind of cosmopolitanism simply reinforces the violence of European imperialism and colonialism. Most pointedly, for example, the genocide of First Nations peoples and the institutionalized practice of slavery in North America, both structurally embedded in the institutions of the United States, exemplify the results of Europe’s colonial ambitions abroad.

Rejecting this kind of value system, in contrast, we present the volume in its international scope as strategically impressionistic and plural rather than comprehensive. Claims of being comprehensive rely on metanarratives that are inherently Eurocentric (being attached to the Enlightenment ideal of attaining full knowledge by situating oneself in the “correct” point of view). This model, which came to its height in the modern period of the political domination of Europe and then the United States, was pressured and critiqued by post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Édouard Glissant in the 1960s through the 1990s. Expanding on Foucault and Glissant, both of whom recognized the coercive qualities of this regime of seeing and knowing, Erika Balsom (2017) has recently noted that:

Exposure is violent; it makes the surveilled subject vulnerable to capture by apparatuses of power. Moreover, to see something clearly, fully, can easily slide into the mistaken assumption that it is known, comprehended in its totality—which is itself a form of violence.

But Balsom also points out how far we have come in our postmodern age from the European modern regime, with its reliance on the belief in a pre-existing “real” that anchors representation. Balsom rightly substantiates one very dangerous aspect of this shift by noting how far-right political figures in the United States have claimed and exploited the idea of reality as an *effect of* looking and the images that represent this “vision,” an idea that some might simplistically connect to poststructuralist philosophers’ critique of metanarratives and a singular concept of reality. She cites Karl Rove (chief of staff to US Republican president George W. Bush) stating in 2004 that those who believe in “a judicious study of discernable reality” to understand the world were behind the times: “‘That’s not the way the world really works anymore,’ he [Rove] continued. ‘We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality’” (Balsom 2017). The effects of this right-wing extension of a simplified version of poststructuralist ideas could be seen dramatically in and beyond the Trump presidency, where facts that people could see with their own eyes were thrown in doubt by a rhetoric of “fake news” and “voter fraud.” Additionally, the reinvigorated totalitarian and fascist regimes across Europe, in India, and many other parts of the world in the early twenty-first century also rely on versions of “alternative facts” (to cite Trump administration apologist Kellyanne Conway from a 2017 interview) to secure their grip on power. This general resurgence of fascism across the world since the failure of the stock market in 2008 and the economic flattening and mass deaths of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) point to this phenomenon being international, although it clearly plays out differently according to the historic class and social structures of each location (see Blake 2017). One hypothesis is that these new forms of supposedly populist far-right power have risen in the vacuum left by deeply discredited forms of centrist-right neoliberal economic models accompanied and partially produced

by distorted forms of cultural liberalism produced by right-wing culture wars, but we will leave that discussion to another day.¹

In stark contrast to both the Enlightenment-to-modern European regime of seeing and knowing and the latter-day postmodern models of derealization, of making things up to serve increasingly neoliberal and right-wing power brokers in Euro-American contexts and beyond, in this book the writers, thinkers, makers, and scholars from varying practices, backgrounds, identifications, and locations provide a plurivocal and highly specific picture. Rich and varied, this picture is deliberately non-comprehensive, and yet also insistently aligned with concrete practices and bodies in actual spaces, subjects who are making art and remaking the art complex—including these very authors who were chosen because their perspectives were global in approach while also recognizing the ways in which art represents a diversity of identities, communities, cultures, and nations. In this way, *A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework* challenges the very metanarratives through which Eurocentric ideas have long structured and dominated the art complex, but it also refuses the distortions of the contemporary situation, including—as has been perfected in the United States and Europe in the past decade—the ignoring and obscuring of actual suffering and financial precarity through “art washing” (using the visual arts to cover over inequities) and through culture war ideologies that demonize most often the very people suffering the most. Art washing can take many forms, including powerful art museums sheltering on their boards millionaires who make their money in nefarious and deadly ways. For example, Warren Kanders, CEO of a company that manufactures arms responsible for killing asylum seekers and other oppressed peoples, was vice president of the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) Board of Directors until persistent activists mounted numerous protests to force his resignation in 2019 (Penny 2019; Gamso 2021).

The book’s strategy relies, in the words of political scientist Farah Godrej, on a destabilizing kind of cosmopolitanism wherein “multiply located” scholars or theorists, “through their repeated self-dislocations and relocations, are uniquely positioned to provide ethical reflections and critiques that do not simply claim to be the result of universalizable reason and morality, but rather recognize the particularity of the external norms being relied upon” (Godrej 2011, 143). For Godrej, this cosmopolitanism involves “the (perhaps long and arduous) work of building coeval and post-Eurocentric possibilities of engagement through repeated self-dislocation and relocation” (Godrej 2011, 143). Our contributors provide precisely this self-questioning space of dialogue across their rich and complex examinations of multifaceted aspects of so-called contemporary art in and beyond the Euro-American art complex.

In this way, the book begins with the problem of “art” as itself Eurocentric. By this we mean *art* as it is currently mobilized as a category to value certain kinds of human-made things, *not* as a broader idea of creativity or the making of things across cultures. A true attention to creative production around the world would, precisely, be understood (in Godrej’s words) as dislocating and relocating art (as it is currently understood in what is considered the “global” art world) away from its narrow cleaving to Eurocentric ideas based on eighteenth-century aesthetics. This book gives many glimpses of such a dislocated, “post-Eurocentric” idea of artistic practice. But fundamentally its premises are at the same time, we acknowledge, founded in Euro-American ideas, as we elaborate in this Introduction.

Here, it is important to expand on what we mean by “Western in logic” and “Eurocentric.” Europe, in the early modern to Enlightenment periods (roughly 1500–1800), claimed superiority in relation to the parts of the world it was directly colonizing and dominating, and from which it was extracting resources. This claim of superiority was based in part (some argue in large part) on concepts of *art* as signaling the inherent value of objects made by Europeans and so art functions precisely as an ideological means to substantiate and justify colonization.² Art, in the European sense, also instantiated Eurocentric ways of



FIGURE I.1 Map showing Vienna city plan with Museum of Natural History and Museum of Art, Vienna (Naturhistorisches Museum Wien, built 1872–1889, and Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, built 1871–1891), facing across the Maria-Theresa Place; both museums hold the former Hapsburg collections of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Maps Data: Google LLC.

seeing as knowing in the early modern and modern periods. Its institutions, including the private collection and later the art museum in contrast to the natural history museum, literalized Europe's organization of the world into "rational" units: in the case of museums that were founded from the late eighteenth century onward in the urban centers of Europe and its colonies, "art" by white people was opposed to "artifacts" by colonized or enslaved people of color. One type of object—art—was privileged and housed in the art museum, the other type—artifact—was placed usually anonymously in the ethnographic or "natural history" museum.³ Importantly, this hierarchical split functioned to place value on the individual makers—artistic geniuses—of art works while anonymizing the makers of non-European creative products—which would be displayed as un-authored objects, arranged according to type or location (Figure I.1).

Even individual works of art in Europe literalized in their very form Eurocentric modes of seeing and knowing. For example, beginning in the fifteenth century in Europe, so-called Renaissance paintings were structured through the system of perspective, which assumed a singular (implicitly male and European) maker (later to be substituted by a singular, implicitly white male, viewer, collector, curator, or interpreter) who could make/view the field depicted such that this act of making/evaluating represented "truth." As what Renaissance theorist Leon Battisti Alberti called a "window onto the world," the perspectival paintings of the European early modern period offered a literalization of a belief system putting white European (or later Euro-American) men at the center of making, interpreting, seeing, and knowing (Alberti 1991, 54; Figure I.2).

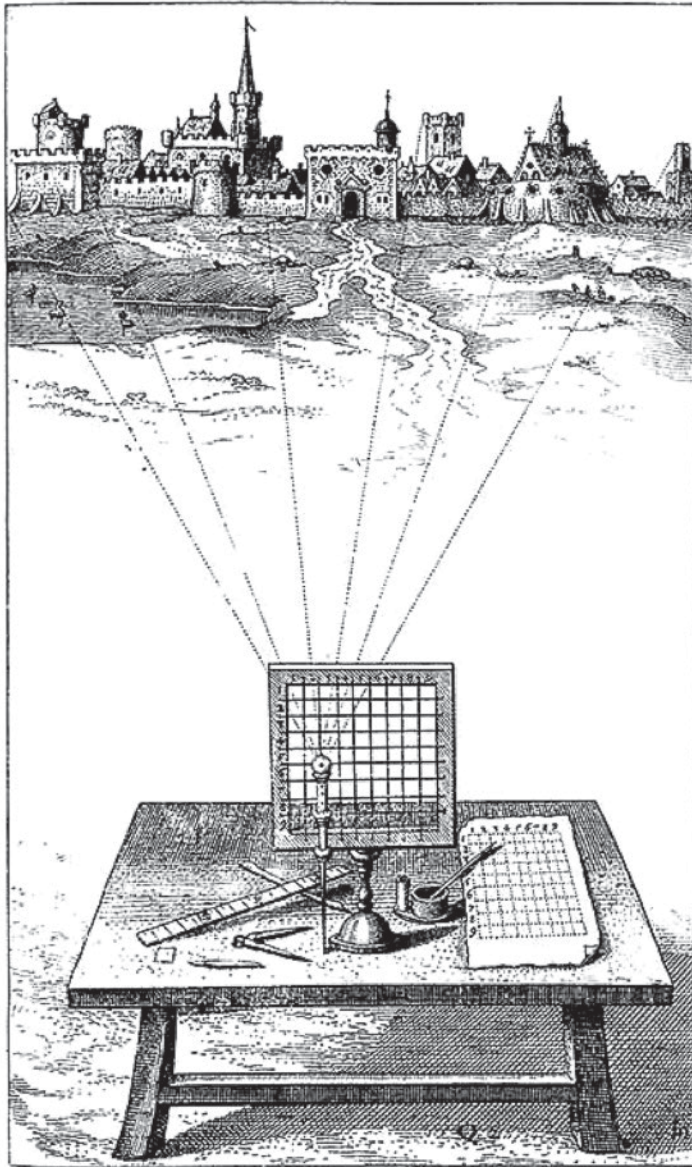


FIGURE I.2 Leon Battisti Alberti's grid as described in his 1435 treatise *On Painting*, as visualized by Robert Fludd in 1617. World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo.

Even so, the structure of European painting and the logic of its spaces of display mark an early part of the shift to what Michel Foucault called a “panoptic” way of organizing society, such that certain kinds of people (economically privileged white men) would consistently be empowered to dominate and regulate others (“criminals” from the laboring classes, the “insane,” or—extrapolating on Foucault—women and enslaved and colonized others (Foucault 1975)). These structures, one could argue, have inspired most of the successful “global” art practices—either in concert with or in violent reaction against them—up to the present day. One cannot meander through a “global” biennial or art fair without witnessing this tension between older Eurocentric forms and modes of making and displaying (themselves tied to belief systems central to colonialism and its aftermaths) and critical practices aimed at undermining, critiquing, refusing, or redoing them. And yet, we insist, this art

complex is still European in its basic forms. The vast majority of works shown are by artists trained in Western-style art schools or otherwise knowledgeable about the key Euro-American “movements” that came to define modern and contemporary art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even the ways in which artists, curators, and critics think about “critique” are historically grounded in Euro-American modernist models of avant-gardism. (Godrej (2011) makes a similar point in her examination of liberalism and cosmopolitanism in political theory—we still apply “liberal” values to our interpretations and practices in relation to politics as well as, in this case, art.)

“Global” is thus a term that implies comprehensive coverage, but it inevitably structures this claim through Euro-American frameworks. Even the very concept of comprehensive coverage is itself tied directly to the Enlightenment presumption that the world can be fully “known” through the right perspectival orientation (as established, inevitably, by an ideal white male viewer). “Global art” thus implies a world of visual material as seen by experts positioned in the right way; but inevitably this model excludes vast parts of our the infinitely varied world of visual production. Seeking to expose these structurally Eurocentric aspects of any art historical or visual culture compendium, *A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework* is presented through a self-reflexive framework. We as editors have sought to challenge these presumptions through numerous strategies including, as noted, inviting contributors not just from the ranks of art history but from other academic fields—including media studies, performance studies, and gender and sexuality studies—and not just from academia but from other areas of the art complex (artists, activists, media practitioners, and curators). The studies by these authors explore a range of artists, artworks, exhibitions, methodologies, subjects, and objects of art in relation to global contexts, revealing the expansion of cultural perspectives as well as cultural synthesis and enmeshments in contemporary art. Still, this is a book (a form Europeans perfected after the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in the early modern period) and the findings and arguments take place in chapters, most (but not all) of which adhere to fairly academic standards of writing. All the text is in the English language, installing another extension of colonization via the trajectory of British imperialism and then the ascendancy of the United States as a political and cultural power in the mid-twentieth century; and authors were commissioned by two scholars trained originally in art history in the North American context. The book is also organized in ways compatible with the post-Enlightenment project of making sense of a complex world of information and visual art through rational categories (chronology and themes).

If the core premise of the book is thus that contemporary art and the modes of history, criticism, curating, and institutionalization that have come to frame, historicize, curate, and market it are structurally European, then some key questions remain. Can art be understood beyond these confines? Can the word and the concept be taken away from the English language and the current international art marketplace, based in deep history on colonialist extraction? Do we need another word/concept and a different way of examining its manifestations across borders?

One fascinating way to approach these questions would be to move beyond the critique of Eurocentrism or European-based notions of art (a critique that, even here, ends by repeating the centrality of Europe) to insist that this formulation *could not exist without the counterexamples of extra-European ideas about visual and embodied and ritualized creativity*. In other words, we would like to put pressure—as our contributors do throughout the volume—on the very concept that European aesthetics and art developed in a vacuum, as any critique of Eurocentrism tends to imply. While this acknowledgment—that the Euro-American art complex was always already formed *in relation to* other cultural systems of belief and ways of making and doing creatively—is asserted here, it cannot be the focus of this volume. We dream about a follow-up volume (or many volumes) that would present historical analyses of the moments since European colonization began when myriad modes of non-European visual culture, art, and visibility put pressure on then-existing European

ideas, thus transforming them. In other words, pointing out that what we think of as “European” in essence was from its beginnings in the early modern period defined in relation to the complex and rich cultures of colonized and enslaved others. We fantasize that these follow-up studies might put an end to Eurocentrism in relation to the visual arts as such. But for now, our task is to cover “contemporary art in a global framework.”

The Timeframe of the Book: c. 1980

Amelia Jones

A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework was initially conceived as a revision of my original 2006 edited volume, *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*. But on reflection it became clear that it did not make sense to revise the 2006 volume, which stands as a workable and seemingly useful compendium of its moment but is too outdated to revise without completely redoing. So much has happened (for me personally but also on the larger stage) since 2005, when I finished that book. I moved twice again internationally (from the United Kingdom to Canada and then back to the United States); and the world has since then been convulsed multiple times by financial crises and the rise of neonationalist factions (not incidentally casting into question the legitimacy of liberal/neoliberal capitalism), eye-opening resurgent rights movements around the world, and a pandemic. At this point I also knew that I needed to invite a co-editor who has a strong anti-colonial research practice and method and access to a different cultural point of view—hence Jane Chin Davidson, who was born in Hong Kong and raised on the West Coast of the United States, was brought on board. A specialist in contemporary art between the United States and China, including in the long history of the Euro-American construction of “Chineseness” in world expositions starting in the nineteenth century, Chin Davidson was perfectly poised to guide and push this project far beyond my 2006 book (see Chin Davidson 2019, Chapters 21 and 34 in this volume).

Decolonial and decolonizing are complex terms (see Patel, Chapter 24). Decolonization applies to the literal overthrow or collapse of European colonial governments across formerly colonized nations, accelerating in the twentieth century—and in fact the term as used in defining the historical period has been most dramatically mobilized in African and Latin American contexts with the shaking off of European political domination since WWII. Decolonial theory, rather, differs from historicization and relates to and builds on postcolonial theory, which arguably had its heyday from 1980 to 2010 and focused on critically examining historic European discourses and practices as well as histories of colonialism (for example, in his landmark 1979 book *Orientalism*, Edward Said mounted a robust critique of European colonial constructions of the “orient” as other (Said 1979, and see Farago, Chapter 9 in this volume). Postcolonial theory aligned in the 1980s and 1990s with post-structuralist philosophy and an anti-racist cultural studies as well as feminism and critical race theory, the latter on the rise in the United States starting in the 1980s (see Morgan, Chapter 26 in this volume). In subtle contrast, decolonial theory (which has become the dominant term since around 2010) points to the ongoing attempts to denaturalize Eurocentric value systems by consistently exposing their particularity and their relation to political violence and extraction. It also embraces the erosion of these value systems by applying Indigenous modes of thought. Decolonial thought has roots far back in the twentieth century among theorists of the Afro-Caribbean Négritude movement, including Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, as well as theorists from Latin America; it has a strong presence in the Pacific region and within Indigenous studies (see Montoya, Chapter 19, and Tonga and Vercoe, Chapter 6 in this volume).

We are openly framing this project in a way that builds on decolonial thinking. We do this with the proviso (already noted) that books of this nature, and even the concepts of “art”

and “contemporaneity,” are European but—as Aotearoa New Zealand decolonial scholars Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Lee Wallace, and Anne Salmond have independently pointed out, and as Chin Davidson and I suggest earlier—always already also shaped by the peoples formerly dominated by European powers (the Indigenous and enslaved).⁴ We are attempting to tread a thin line between the entrenched Eurocentrism of any conversation about “art” per se and seeking to unsettle this Eurocentrism by loosening and broadening the concept of art, as so many artists and curators—many of whose works are featured here—have been doing around the world. We acknowledge that this is a theoretical and intellectual project and that we are *not* literally decolonizing (giving back land or repatriating those whose communities have been violated, destroyed, and/or compromised through the project of colonization of which the art complex is one arm).⁵

Chin Davidson and I have thus attempted in the book to rethink the very concept of “contemporary art” mobilized in my earlier *Companion* volume, first and foremost by changing the historical framing: by focusing specifically on art since 1980—arguably the turning point away from modernism to a more definitive “postmodern” and “postcolonial” interrogation of the Eurocentrism of the visual arts, but also arguably in many cases a reinforcement and entrenchment of Western art centers and concepts as definitive. With the United States becoming economically and culturally dominant after 1945, and with my location at the time having been in the United Kingdom, the earlier volume was overtly Western Europe- and US- centric, like most accounts of contemporary art at the time (especially those written in English). The post-1980 period has witnessed an increasingly connected world in terms of rapid travel and communication, including social media (for better or worse); a transformation and reassertion of the USSR-cum-Russia along with the rest of Eastern Europe; a rising superpower in the increasingly globally connected China; an oil-industry enriched Middle East; rapidly shifting relations within and among Latin American, Pacific, and African countries—marked in visible ways by cultural exchanges such as biennials and art fairs—among other international forces.

Furthermore, our decision to begin this book with 1980 as a touchstone (not precluding many references to earlier periods) was also based on the almost two decades that have passed since the 2006 volume was published. At some point, the “contemporary,” which, at the beginning of my career in the early 1990s was situated as starting in 1945 (at the end of WWII and of course marked by the explosive rise of the United States as a superpower), shifts toward more recent decades.

In fact, 1980 is an auspicious starting point not only in relation to the visual arts per se, but also in relation to the political and cultural history of the United Kingdom and the United States—marked by the election of openly neoliberal conservatives (Margaret Thatcher in 1979 in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in 1980 in the United States). Neoliberalism is an economic and political doctrine that both extended and transformed the classic liberalism of the European Enlightenment and revolutionary eighteenth century, turning it toward conservative ends.⁶ This was an economic and political structure that pivoted around, while also co-constructing new versions of, ideologies connecting individualism and individual freedom to the marketplace. It promoted the freedom to “buy” or to “choose” which culture to consume. It reduced or eliminated the tax burden on the very wealthy (thereby increasing the gap between the rich and the poor but supposedly loosening up the purse strings of the rich for “trickle down” effects, which never materialized). It argued for restricting the size of the government (to increase the “freedom” to consume, especially for the wealthy). And it insisted on inflating military spending by continuing to articulate “threats” that supposedly existed to undermine “democracy” (beyond those of the cold war, which were fading, the new supposed threats involved political actors such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq—largely those who could no longer be controlled by the United States or its allies). Furthermore, under neoliberalism, culture wars, especially in the voluble US context, have been periodically waged by the right wing to keep the masses in line by distracting them or

diverting their attention away from the precarities installed by late capitalist labor markets. These versions of neoliberalism are often mirrored, either directly or in distorted ways, by the values espoused by artists, curators, and scholars (on these points, see Shaked 2022).

The art complex sustains and manufactures its own versions of neoliberalism. Under its forces, the art complex has been transformed. Even before neoliberal late capitalism, just after WWII the visual arts domain was moving from seeming to be a sleepy and peripheral form of culture known primarily by elites and that was at best adjacent to “real” political and economic structures under modernism (in the Euro-American context) to being acknowledged as central—along with other forms of culture—to the modes of dissemination crucial to maintaining both ideologies of “freedom” and “resistance” as well as those of the status quo. As has been thoroughly researched, for example, the works of the American Abstract Expressionist movement were thus marketed abroad by the US State Department in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art in New York as epitomizing the “freedom” of US-style “democracy” (itself, in these discourses, a code word really signifying free-market capitalism).⁷

This acknowledgment of the interrelation between the various parts of the art complex and political discourse as well as economic policies has been a double-edged sword. It is crucial in that previous modernist models and theories never resolved how art related to forms of capital, other than (through the model of the dealer or auction house) as examples of commodities, often in discourses of contemporary art revolving around arguments that the artist had “sold out” to the forces of capital. By the 1980s and 1990s, artists, poststructuralist philosophers, sociologists, and other (in Godrej’s sense) cosmopolitan critics were able to theorize how art was not *peripheral* to capitalism, but was (and is) one of its supreme exemplifications—in Marx’s sense, it is quintessentially *mystified*, one of the key defining characteristics of the commodity.⁸ Institutional critique, among other “critical” modes of art making, were aligned with this theorization of art as inextricably bound up in capitalism with the accompanying implicit imperative that left-wing artists intervene in this aspect of the making, display, and dissemination of art (see Hudson, Chapter 15; Raqs Media Collective, Chapter 17; Ou Ning, Chapter 25).

As the essays in this volume point out, the 1980s was also a decade of massive international political and social shifts. It was the period in which Chinese protests opened the country to international media scrutiny (most notably in the 1989 uprisings; see Ou Ning, Chapters 25; Chin Davidson, Chapter 34); the colonization of Eastern Europe by Russia as the USSR rapidly dissolved and the iron curtain fell (also in 1989–90; see Harutyunyan, Chapter 4); powerful postcolonial, feminist, queer, and anti-racist theories came to the fore in academia and were connected to discourses of poststructuralism and postmodernism; and even the art complex started to take on critical theories and critical methods (see Patel, Chapter 24; Ou Ning, Chapter 25; Morgan and Jones, Chapter 26; Baca, Chapter 27; Lehner and Jones, Chapter 28). While these latter discourses put pressure on the art complex and introduced epic changes whose ripple effects are still very present, in retrospect one can see how quickly each political transformation enacted on art discourse has been incorporated into the art marketplace—for example, New York’s “Pictures” group of artists, celebrated and informed by a wave of critical theory being introduced into art discourse in the 1980s, were fully incorporated into major commercial galleries such as Mary Boone by 1990 (see Hudson, Chapter 15). Finally, while our current media-scape has roots that reach back to prehistory (humans’ first uses of tools to make marks, perhaps), 1980—with the introduction of personal computers—also marks one of the beginning points from which to understand the massive shifts in technology, information dissemination, and other millennial shifts that have dominated the early twenty-first century—leaving us in our current state with social media, NFT block-chain technologies, Artificial Intelligence engines such as ChatGPT, and crypto currencies dominating cultural conversations (see Steyerl and Vikram, Chapter 30; Murray, Chapter 31; Quick and Kafer, Chapter 32).

The period beginning with the 1980s also marks a period of further decolonization around the world, expanding on the shift away from literal political colonization of India, the countries in Africa, the Pacific, the Middle East, and parts of East Asia (Vietnam and Korea, with their attendant colonial wars) that had obtained in the twentieth century (see Adusei-Poku, Chapter 8; Corey, Chapter 11; Ozpinar, Chapter 20). The period 1980–2020 arguably can be seen as defined by this shift occurring in tandem with the rapid and sometimes violent increase in “soft” colonization through the multifarious modes and means of late capitalism including mass culture but also the ideology purveyed by and through the art complex. The catastrophic attacks by Al Qaeda members on the World Trade Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on September 11, 2001 (the event called “9/11”), as many have argued, could be understood as having resulted from the resentments fostered by the soft colonizing efforts of the United States through its culture. While not precluding the ongoing effects of the “hard” colonialism of the United States, including CIA and military efforts to continually destabilize regimes in the Middle East and beyond, this cultural power can be viewed as taking place via the art complex as well as via the mainstream entertainment industry (see Grigor, Chapter 16).

Beginning our story around 1980—a moment, as noted, defined by the wholesale introduction of neoliberalism into the United Kingdom and United States and by the surge of global travel and quickening communication methods—thus allows the editors and the authors to clarify, define, and set forth the goal of decolonizing previous modes of historicizing art as implicitly always already Eurocentric. It also allows for a broad exploration of the rise of the concept of “global art,” the burgeoning of international biennials, and the political urgency of accounting for creative visual expression (we might still call it art or find new terms) as well as cultural and historical frameworks beyond the Euro-American geographical and cultural sphere. As James d’Emilio (2020, 21) has argued: “A decolonized art history looks beyond diversifying canons, curricula, and practitioners. It recognizes that we now study, teach, and display art with culturally specific methods whose universal claims reflect early modern and modern European hegemony.” And per this decolonial project, the book acknowledges the Eurocentrism of art history while providing an alternative history to that of the European imagination or “Westernisms,” per Okwui Enwezor’s call for the 2002 Documenta he organized. Westernisms is a term Enwezor invented to sum up, in his words, “that sphere of global totality that manifests itself through the political, social, economic, cultural, juridical, and spiritual integration achieved via institutions devised and maintained solely to perpetuate the influence of European and North American modes of being,” asserting itself as “the only viable idea of social, political, and cultural legitimacy from which modern subjectivities are seen to emerge” (Enwezor 2002, 45–46).

The Book’s Organizational Logic

Amelia Jones

The framing logic of the book thus pivots around the post 1980 intensities of colonization, post/decolonization, late capitalism/neoliberalism, as well as the rights movements such as civil rights, feminist, LGBTQ, and social justice movements as drivers of visual arts and culture, and additionally as ideal lenses through which to examine them. In the contemporary period, the visual arts assume the position of articulating identities, identity politics, and cultures beyond their modern function in representing cultural heritages and in nation building. Following the format of my 2006 volume, *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, this new and original edited volume is organized through a two-fold logic: it is comprised of chronological as well as thematic chapters by art history, performance studies, gender studies, and/or visual culture historians and theorists from different cultural

positions and from a range of geographical locations (albeit all of them “cosmopolitan,” in the sense explored earlier—for what filters out to the awareness of an international art community if not visual expression conditioned by the speedy disseminating cultural networks of modernity and postmodernity?).

Similarly to my logic in organizing the earlier volume, here the chronological chapters are intended to guide the reader through key elements of each period, but, in this case, through counternarratives eschewing an exclusive or unself-reflexive focus on Euro-American movements and terms. The chronological chapters in Part II thus largely shift away from hegemonic narratives of contemporary art, offering rather a perspective focused on China (Lin, Chapter 2 on the 1980s); Eastern Europe (Harutyunyan, Chapter 4 on the 1990s); the Pacific region, especially Aotearoa New Zealand (Vercoc and Tonga, Chapter 6 on the decade of 2000–2010); and African and African diaspora art Adusei-Poku, Chapter 8 on the 2010s). Accompanying each decade exploration is an artist’s statement—written by an artist the editors felt had a deep and particular, and thus revealing, understanding of the decade in question: Chapter 1, Senga Nengudi (African American) for the 1980s; Chapter 3, Sutapa Biswas (South Asian-British) for the 1990s; Chapter 5, Tania Bruguera (Cuban and American) for the early 2000s; and Chapter 7, Patrisse Cullors (African American) for the 2010s.

The thematic chapters in Part III are grouped under umbrella rubrics connected to broad social, political, cultural, and economic structures. In the section on **Institutions/Ontology**, the chapters address the themes of colonialism (Farago, Chapter 9), Pedagogy (deSouza, Chapter 10), Craft (Corey, Chapter 11), Performance (Zondi, Chapter 12), and Embodiment/Materiality (Loveless, Chapter 13). While Farago (Chapter 9) provides a deep history for the formation of “art” within the European colonial project, other chapters address meaning and value as these have been determined and understood in relation to contemporary art from different cultural perspectives and modes of presentation (from pedagogical strategies to traditional art works to performative modes to installations to social practice art to monuments). Debates about form, style, and value—whether strictly speaking “aesthetic,” craft-based, or sliding into “political” forms involving activism—are historicized and analyzed for their ideological dimensions and their material and psychological effects. This section thus provides a basis from which to understand where we are today with the art complex.

The chapters in the **Politics/Public Sphere** section—on Revolution (Flores, Chapter 14), Art and Its Marketplaces (Hudson, Chapter 15), Non-Secular Public Spheres (Grigor, Chapter 16), (Anti-) Capitalism (Raqs media Collective, Chapter 17), and Environment (Bloom, Chapter 18)—address the political roles and efficacy of particular types of contemporary art practice among different global paradigms. Each author traces historical links to earlier models of artistic or broader cultural intervention into diverse political spheres, including those of the European and cross- (North, Central, South) American and Caribbean avant-gardes (Flores, Chapter 14), activism and visual culture in the shifting public spheres of Iranian cities (Grigor, Chapter 16), Indian relationships with capitalism (Raqs Media Collective, Chapter 17), and Western artists addressing climate crisis (Bloom, Chapter 18). Questions of who is allowed where, how money saturates the art marketplace, and the material costs of human habits (including those resulting in the art complex) are addressed.

The **Identity/Subjectivity** section addresses a range of identity-based discourses, theories, and activist movements directly or indirectly shaping discourses and practices of art since 1980. The chapters also explore the relation between various art expressions and forms and on-the-ground rights movements. Areas of inquiry include Indigeneity and Indigenous futurisms, from a Turtle Island (North American) perspective (Montoya II, Chapter 19), diaspora/transnationality in the context of Turkey (including Syrian diasporas and Kurdish communities) as well as that of transnational feminism (Ozpinar, Chapter 20); gender/sexuality in art and theory, with an emphasis on queer feminist trans of color cultural expression (Chin Davidson, Chapter 21); race/ethnicity examined in relation to appropriation art by artists of color in the United States (Smith and DiTillio, Chapter 22);

and disability in relation to disability justice performances by the US-based group Sins Invalid (Ramirez and Kafai, Chapter 23). Each author addresses the theories and strategies associated with the area of identity politics they are exploring, and a range of artistic practices (from painting to performance to activism) that elaborate these theoretical agendas on a material and formal level.

The chapters in the **Methods/Theories** section cover specific theoretical frameworks that played a role in examining but also in some cases shaping post-1980 art practices in and beyond the Western art complex: post-/de-colonial theory in various international contexts (Patel, Chapter 24); Marxism/post-Marxism, with a focus on the artist/writer's own "Bishan Project" in Yi County, China (Ou Ning, Chapter 25); critical race theory in relation to the "blast work" needed to transform arts institutions (Morgan and Jones, Chapter 26); poststructuralism in its relation to postmodernism, from a US art historical point of view (Baca, Chapter 27); feminist/queer/trans theory in a historical framework, culminating in Ace Lehner's articulation of an anti-racist trans methodology (Lehner and Jones, Chapter 28); and a rigorous critique of performance theory as it has been articulated in the discipline of performance studies (Chambers-Letson, Chapter 29). The theories and methods are contextualized in relation to particular examples of art and culture, as well as critiqued, expanded, and explored through interdisciplinary lenses.

In the **Technology/Media** section, chapters take on the question of technological and media developments and innovations in relation to contemporary art—how have technological innovations changed the practice of art? How have they changed the circulation and display of art? What has been the impact of social media on contemporary art? New media artist and theorist Hito Steyerl, in dialogue with curator and arts organizer Anuradha Vikram, expansively addresses the Internet as an extension of late capitalism (Chapter 30); Derek Murray examines art historical resistances to social media, stressing its historical and formal connections to historic visual cultural forms (Chapter 31); and Tyler Quick and Greg Kafer jointly critique the racist and otherwise biased aspects of the algorithms that shape the production of visual imagery and our digital worlds (Chapter 32).

The final section of the book, **Exhibition/Collecting/Archive**, bookends the first thematic section on institutions and ontologies. Here questions of how artists have used archives in contemporary art, how archives and exhibitions have documented various forms of art for posterity, and generally speaking how modes of collecting and exhibition have informed and shaped our understanding of contemporary art practices are addressed. These chapters explore the colonial bases of the art museum through a decolonial lens (San Martin, Chapter 33) and the almost two-centuries long history of the global exposition, biennial, and art fair (Chin Davidson, Chapter 34), as well as addressing the limits of curatorial power and the personal and institutional interfaces between curator and artist (Campbell, Chapter 35); the history of collecting practices as they connect to the contemporary global art complex (Mosquera, Chapter 36); and the "archival" in relation to visual art practices as well as curatorial strategies (Nasar, Chapter 37).

The Otherness of "Art"

Amelia Jones

The title of this book—*A Companion to Contemporary Art in a Global Framework*—might imply vast ambitions and a pretense of comprehensiveness. It is worth stressing again, in that light, that our ambitions are big, but *not* in terms of coverage; they are big in terms of how we hope the book will participate in a sea change moving discourses of art, art history, curating, and thinking around visibility away from Eurocentric models of seeing and

knowing. In that sense, we are framing the book through an introduction that may well read as a manifesto—this is our imagining of an art history that is interdisciplinary and insists on troubling the deep structural inequities built into the art complex.

Let us be clear: we in no way present this volume as conveying a comprehensive history of contemporary “global art,” an ambition that in itself would be Eurocentric (“universality” being one of the most pervasive tropes of Enlightenment-to-modern thinking in the West). The aim, rather, is to honor the growing recognition that the whole of the traditional institutional model for the teaching and historicizing of art according to geography (with Europe at the center) and chronology (with European historical events as the touchstones) to frame movements and styles (with the implicit assumption being these are disconnected from social history) is no longer useful. It is not only outdated but also toxic in its continuation of exclusionary frameworks and methodologies that masquerade as neutral or disinterested while functioning as covert marketing strategies and thus participate in and shore up the very capitalist structures and neoliberal concepts of value that so much of contemporary art discourse and curatorial work claims radical forms of art inherently resist.

This companion is thus aimed at providing useful information and cutting-edge arguments. But it also seeks to provide a challenge, a critique, a questioning of this earlier model for the modernist Western, non-Western, or global art survey, still taught in many undergraduate and graduate art history programs in and beyond the English-speaking worlds. It does so by contributing alternative approaches, perspectives, and strategies, and by rethinking the work of art history outside of the old institutional frames, while acknowledging the inevitable westernisms that continue to define art and art history as such. Our final point would be to reiterate that, as Enwezor (from Nigeria but living and working in the United States and Germany, among other places) understood better than anyone, these westernisms have always themselves been conditioned by and formed in relation to the colonized others that they claimed were irrelevant to considerations of high art practice. By refusing to sideline these other modes of thinking and making any longer not only can we view works previously excluded and change the narratives and conceptions of art in that way; we can also start to understand that Eurocentrism is itself a lie that serves to obscure the ways in which European-based cultures and concepts and categories (such as art) are inherently and structurally “non-Western.” In other words, art has never been *only* European. It has always been (among other things) a reaction formation to the vast range of cultures Europeans sought to dominate and eradicate. As such it holds these within it. If anything, then, this book seeks to reintroduce and foreground an awareness of the otherness within art as it has been defined and institutionalized in European-dominant parts of the world.

Notes

- 1 Amelia is currently researching a book on the neoliberalism and structural racism of the twenty-first century art complex and university, tentatively entitled *Cultural Capitalism*. For a preliminary view, see Jones (2021b).
- 2 On this point, we are indebted to the work of William Pietz on the European idea of fetishism as a projection based on “othering” the productions and belief systems of the colonized in opposition to the supposedly more sophisticated logical capacity and “art” produced by European colonizers; see Pietz (1985, 1987). See also the brilliant Matory (2018).
- 3 This is an extension of Pietz’s ideas (see Pietz 1985, 1987) but also of the groundbreaking and erudite intellectual and historical work of Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago; see especially Preziosi and Farago (2004).
- 4 Aotearoa is the Indigenous (Māori Te Reo) name for what the white settlers or “Pākehā” termed New Zealand. See Tuhiwai Smith (1999); Wallace (2003); Salmond (2018). I discuss this reciprocal formation in relation to peoples of the Pacific and concepts of sexuality/gender in the final two chapters (“Other,” and “Trans”) of Jones (2021a, 248–349).

- 5 To this end, we openly admit that we cannot answer the call made by the important and often-cited argument of Tuck and Yang (2012, 19, 21): “Until stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism ... decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice.” In the end, we choose to stick with decolonization because it does work that social justice rhetoric does not. We are not attempting to implement social justice through our critical framework; we are attempting, if inevitably not going far enough, to decolonize art discourse.
- 6 There is a deep history to the rise of neoliberalism, with its roots in some of the more unsavory aspects of Enlightenment liberalism (such as the combination of slavery and discourses around “freedom,” which apply only to particular kinds of people). Its explicit beginnings go back to the early 1930s, with a group of economists developing a model of resisting rising collectivism in the West. See Maclean (2017); Fischer (2009); Gerstle (2022).
- 7 On the marketing of Abstract Expressionism abroad, see Kozloff (1973); Cockroft (1974); Guilbaut (1983).
- 8 Karl Marx in *Capital* discusses the way in which under capitalism things that are made become mystified through their circulation, because their value in this system of circulation relies on social structures and codes rather than purely on labor input or use value. It is through this structure that the commodity becomes a fetish. See Marx (1867; see especially Part I, “Commodities and Money,” section 4: “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4>).

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Part I



DECADES

1980–1990

I Live in the Fourth Dimension When I Create Landscapes: Artist Statement

Senga Nengudi

These landscapes are made out of materials that are discards and commonplace. I like to dance with the spaces I occupy, creating a triad. Partnering, we show what each other have to offer. Selection of a site and materials is critical to my creative process. They are my way into a concept that seems to usher forth (take form) from my manipulation of them.

I prevail with “what is at hand.” My installations are subtle and intimate, involving issues of time and personal change. They are durable like a bird’s nest with viewers feeling welcome enough to shift from observers to participants. Utilizing masking tape, gravel, dirt, newspapers, powdered tempera, seedpods, stripped pantyhose, photos, and found stuff is a statement in itself.

To shape shift paradigms I find different ways to use materials others consider useless or insignificant, providing proof that the disregarded and disenfranchised may also have the resilience and reformatory ability to find their poetic selves.

In many ways my installations are informed by my performances. An ongoing performance that I began about three years ago is my *What’s in a name?* personas. What is in a name? I propose plenty. That is why I have a different name for each medium I use.

Propecia Leigh—Photographer

Harriet Chin—Painter

Lily Bea Moor—Writer

In Black culture naming has great significance. We have been “called out of our names” so much that controlling that aspect of our lives with a Br’er Rabbit sensibility is important.

Each name has personal significance. But more importantly I wanted to explore the fact that many of us fall into the trap of what an artist’s work “should” look like related to their ethnicity. An ethnic name attached to an artwork assumes us into an unconscious shorthand way of understanding the style or subject matter with expectations of what the style and subject matter should be.

Walk a mile in my shoes is another in-progress performance project. The idea came from an old Japanese folktale that spoke of villagers who were complaining about the weight of their individual problems. The wise man of the village told each villager to write down their problems on a piece of paper and tie them to a large tree that was situated in the center of the village. Each villager was to take down the problem of another and live with it for a while with the option of returning in a month and retrieving their own problem back. Well within a month not only one but all of the villagers hurried to retrieve their own problem back seeing that they were uniquely able to handle their own problems.

My concept is similar. In response to this folk wisdom, I have been mailing shoes out in all directions to people of all sorts with the instructions to the recipient to move, dance, or walk a mile in the shoes they receive, document the event, send the documentation back to me, then send the shoes on to someone else. The concept is to explore how uncomfortable it is to try and fit into another's shoes and show that, no matter how complicated or difficult our problems, we are well suited to handle the twists and turns of our own lives. In addition to shoes traveling to parts of Colorado, California, New York, Maryland, etc., one pair has already changed feet twice on the way to Denmark. An artist's book is in process to be completed upon receipt of 100 pieces of documentation.

NOTE: This statement was originally published on Senga Nengudi's website, available at: <https://www.sengasenga.com/statement>; accessed May 18, 2022



FIGURE 1.1 Senga Nengudi, *R.S.V.P. Reverie A*, 2011; nylon mesh and metal. World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo. Huggins Family Collection, photograph by Amelia Jones. As displayed at Art + Practice, Los Angeles, 2018.



FIGURE 1.2 Senga Nengudi, *Blossom*, 2014, DETAIL; nylon mesh and metal. Courtesy of the artist, photograph by Amelia Jones. As displayed at Fisher Gallery, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 2018.

Seeing Beyond East/West Divides: Contemporary Art in and Around 1980s China

Jenny Lin

Artistic creation is an extraordinarily private process of psychological development, and is strongly individualistic in character. Collaboration means compromise ... Love requires compromise, and I was compromising constantly because of my love.

Xiao Lu (2010, 148)

What is lost is the idea of living together, a collective search for a better way of life ... Many young people – I'm referring above all to the generation subsequent to mine – don't take the past into consideration at all. They don't even need to forget it, since they didn't know it in the first place.

Yang Fudong, cited in Nisbet (2008, 40)

This chapter explores Chinese art and visual culture of the 1980s, considered as China's most experimental decade for contemporary art.¹ Complicating essentializing *Western versus Eastern* (individualistic, capitalistic, democratic versus collectivist, socialist, communist) binaries, I discuss artists active in 1980s China vis-à-vis cross-cultural influences, debated authorship, and networks upholding or combating oppressive structures. I analyze destruction as an artistic strategy in Chinese historical and sociopolitical contexts, and spotlight marginalized female artist Xiao Lu, who utilizes storytelling to counter patriarchy. The latter part of the chapter considers the visual culture of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in relation to censorship and struggles between individuals and state power, struggles persisting across geographies. While focusing on art and visual culture in 1980s China, with some attention to Western art-historical models, this chapter illuminates creative modes of resistance that resonate through art's histories and into our fragile globalized present.

Many art historians, curators, and critics, including prominent transnational figures such as Wu Hung and Gao Minglu, position the 1980s as the period when contemporary art in China first emerged following the Mao Era (1949–1976).² In the 1980s, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials lifted numerous Maoist restrictions and reestablished international exchanges, both economic and cultural. In many regions of the People's Republic of China (PRC), artists experimented and formed dozens of collectives, giving rise

to what would come to be called the '85 New Wave Movement. Gao Minglu writes about the many important events that occurred in 1985, including the conclusion of the conservative Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign (initiated in 1983) and February 1985 Chinese Writers Association conference, in which participants denounced censorship and called for free expression:

This period was characterized by the most intense discussion of culture since the early twentieth century. Many works of Western philosophy, history, aesthetics, and psychology appeared in translation. Numerous scholarly conferences were held one after the other. Chinese scholars, both in China and abroad, involved themselves in the debate. At the same time, ancient Chinese philosophy, history, culture, and religion were reevaluated, criticized, or accepted according to contemporary standards ... In 1985 and 1986, seventy-nine self-organized avant-garde art groups, including more than 2,250 of the nation's young artists, emerged to organize exhibitions, to hold conferences, and to write manifestos and articles about their art (Gao 2011).

In 1985 and the years immediately before and after, Chinese artists, having come of age in the strictly controlled Maoist cultural sphere of the 1950s–1970s, embraced diverse styles and expressive modes.

Throughout the 1980s, Chinese artists and art students excitedly engaged with previously forbidden art histories and theories. They formed groups reminiscent of European and American avant-gardes, some directly referencing Western counterparts, as in Xiamen Dada (1986–1989), founded by artist Huang Yong Ping. Xiamen Dada members, invested in questioning the value of art while embracing ephemerality, performed acts that teetered between creation and destruction such as collectively burning their artworks after an exhibition or dropping them off at a garbage dump to be hauled off by trucks. As revealed by the title of his installation, Huang Yong Ping's *The History of Chinese Art and A Concise History of Modern Painting Washed in a Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987) (Figure 2.1) reduced two art history books to exhibitable pulp. In washing the texts, Huang Yong Ping melded and rendered illegible a history of Chinese art and modern Western painting, representing the limits of two, typically exclusive art historical canons.

Modern art history, when tied to a formalist mythology of Western European cultural progress, leaves out multiple stories—of colonialist plundering of artifacts, imperialist cultural impositions, and modernist experiments outside Europe and North America. Having studied abroad, many artists active in China's Republican Era (1911–1949) positioned themselves as *modern* or *modeng* (a Chinese transliteration from French and English) by integrating Western art concepts with Chinese and local styles, content, and concerns.³ Huang Yong Ping's act of mixing together Western modern and Chinese art histories thus paralleled, albeit with the added tactic of deconstruction, Republican China's modern art experiments. Traditional Chinese art histories, meanwhile, tend to ignore the country's cross-cultural examples such as hybrid modernisms rampant in the 1920s–1930s and later adaptations of Soviet socialist realism in the 1950s–1970s.⁴ While Western art histories and theories served as inspiration, artists working in 1980s China also maintained culturally specific and interrelated references. For instance, Huang Yong Ping cited Chan Buddhism as a primary influence, announcing that “Chan Buddhism is Dada, and Dada is Chan,” and observing “a nexus of distinction and affinity between Chan Buddhism and postmodernism due to their insight, simplicity, and extremely skeptical attitudes” (Gao 2011, 206–207).

The violent extremism of the preceding Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) also undoubtedly informed the tactics of Xiamen Dada, and many artists working in 1980s China. During the Cultural Revolution, CCP officials, aided by Red Guard armies composed primarily of young people supporting Maoist doctrine, aimed to rid China of what were deemed the country's *four olds*: old ideas, old culture, old habits,



FIGURE 2.1 Huang Yong Ping, *The History of Chinese Painting and the History of Modern Western Art Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes*, 1987/1993. Courtesy of Huang Shen Yuan and Estate of Huang Yong Ping.

and old customs.⁵ Cultural policies, dictated by Mao Zedong, his wife, Jiang Qing, and allies, mandated that art serve as a revolutionary tool and adhere to a Soviet-inspired style of heroic socialist realism, elevating the proletariat and, above all, the CCP Chairman himself. Art suspected of not serving Maoist ideology was decried as right wing, bourgeois, and imperialist. The Cultural Revolution's leaders and marauding Red Guards banned and destroyed art and other objects cast as aligned with China's dynastic feudalism (e.g. traditional Chinese landscape painting), religion and philosophy (e.g. Daoist sculpture), and/or foreign-influenced styles (e.g. French Impressionism). Many artists and intellectuals accused of being counterrevolutionaries (such as Ai Qing, the famous modernist poet and father of contemporary artist Ai Weiwei) were stripped from their posts, publicly humiliated, violently assaulted, and exiled.⁶

In the decades following the tumultuous Cultural Revolution, destruction persisted in contemporary Chinese art, perhaps most notably in Ai Weiwei's *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (1995), a performative act documented by a photographic triptych, in which the artist appears holding, dropping, and letting smash on the ground an ancient urn. *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* questions the value of antiques while purposefully and irreverently smashing a dynastic object, mimicking a commonplace act of the Cultural Revolution, when Red Guards would purposefully smash imperial objects, religious statues, and other items deemed old, imperialist, or anti-Maoist.

In the more immediate years following Mao Zedong's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, Ai Weiwei had begun making art as a member of the Stars Group (1979–1983), described by Gao Minglu (2001, 92) as “the first influential avant-garde group, challenging both aesthetic conventions and political authority.” The Stars Group cited as influence Republican China's modernist art, embracing abstraction against the previously mandated socialist realism. Stars Group sculptor Wang Keping's *Idol* (1980), a carved wooden figure

resembling part-Buddhist statue (like those destroyed during the Cultural Revolution) and part-distorted visage of Mao Zedong, challenged the preceding cult of Mao and forced exhibition of the Chairman's heroically rendered portrait on home walls, badges, and other memorabilia. Other Chinese artists active in the 1980s—including Gu Wenda, Xu Bing, and Wu Shanzhuan—deconstructed text, displaying crossed out, amplified, nonsensical, and/or hybridized Chinese characters in installations, sometimes splattered with red paint, referencing the Cultural Revolution's bloody chaos initiated through the linguistic instrumentalization of political propaganda in the big character posters once implemented to purge and denounce so-called counterrevolutionaries.

Resisting Patriarchy Through Artful Storytelling

For the student of Chinese art history, it will come as little surprise that the artists I've mentioned thus far, many of the '85 New Wave Movement's most recognized figures, are all male. Chinese art history has long been dominated by male artists. This is not to say there are no known female Chinese contemporary artists; there have been many of great import, including installation artists Lin Tianmiao and Yin Xiuzhen and video artist Cao Fei, to name a few. Yet these female artists typically receive far less coverage than their male counterparts, with some notable exceptions.⁷ This lack of representation, while not unique to the Chinese art world, grows, at least in part, out of Confucianism. Dynastic China's dominant ideology, Confucianism devalued women, who Confucius characterized as people of "base condition," or, as scholar Xiongya Gao observes, "inferior men" (Gao 2003). The literary scholar further explains how during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–219 CE), under Confucianism, the Three Obediences code of ethics emerged, requiring women to be obedient to their father before marriage, to their husband after marriage, and to their sons after their husband's death (Davidson 2020, 116). Mao Zedong purported to support equality between males and females, encapsulated in the popular Mao-Era statement: "Women can hold up half the sky."⁸ In practice, Maoism demanded women assume responsibilities as model workers, peasants, and soldiers, leading to the formative role of women as leaders of the Cultural Revolution, while maintaining expected roles as dutiful daughters, wives, and mothers. China's deeply patriarchal structure subsisted through the 1980s and into the twenty-first century. Taiwanese scholar Chin-tao Wu notes the extreme lack of female representation in contemporary Chinese art, echoing international art historical trends (such as those of past Venice Biennales): in the Shanghai Biennial, China's most prominent international contemporary art event, from 1996 (the inaugural year) through 2014, percentages of female artists remained "scandalously" low, from a high of 31.3% to single digits (Wu 2017).

The story of Chinese artist Xiao Lu illuminates the sexist terrain of contemporary Chinese art while deconstructing East/West binaries. Xiao Lu grew up in Shanghai and Hangzhou, where her father served as president of the prestigious Chinese Academy of Art, which she attended as a painting major. Like fellow Chinese artists coming of age in the 1980s, Xiao Lu rejected the Cultural Revolution's extreme nationalism, eagerly consuming newly imported European philosophy and theory. She chronicles:

At the beginning of the eighties, well after China had come through the ten years' cultural shackling of the "Great Cultural Revolution," ideas were becoming slightly more liberal. Our minds were like earth which had been drought-stricken all that time and which had now received a fall of nurturing rain. People were intellectually hungry and thirsty. Nietzsche, Freud, Schopenhauer, Kant, Sartre ... Everybody ... was biting off a huge chunk of words and phrases ... which were inherently difficult to understand, but which they nevertheless argued about non-stop [...] In the vast territory of China, before the

economic boom, there was a purely idealistic enterprise which was the rage of that era. Like a bundle of rays of light, it germinated a set of seeds of idealism, and influenced the course of China's historical development (Xiao 2010, 29).

In 1989, Xiao Lu produced arguably the most consequential, culminating work of the '85 New Wave Movement as her contribution to the watershed exhibition *China Avant-garde* in Beijing's National Art Museum. On the morning of February 5, 1989, during the exhibition's opening, Xiao Lu fired a gun two times at her installation *Dialogue* (Figure 2.2). The shots shattered a mirrored panel of *Dialogue*, comprised of a podium and red telephone, with receiver and cord dangling, and two reconstructed telephone booths, each with a mannequin, one dressed in women's clothes and the other in men's, their backs to viewers. As described by Gao Minglu, principal curator on the preparatory committee of the *China Avant-garde* exhibition, *Dialogue* created ripples throughout China's artworld and more broadly, society, spurring officials to place new limits on public performance in the PRC, establishing a politics of live art for years to come (Xiao 2010, ix–x).

Initially, the (in)famous shots were attributed to both Xiao Lu and male artist Tang Song. The two fell in love in the aftermath of the shooting and their arrest—Xiao Lu for firing the gun, Tang Song as a suspected accomplice, presumed guilty by proximity. According to Xiao Lu, exhausted and confused during the ensuing chaos, she allowed Tang Song to pen an explanation of the work and submit it to writers and editors at *China Art Newspaper*, then the most prominent Chinese art periodical:

As parties to the shooting incident on the day of the opening of the China Avant-garde exhibition, we consider it a purely artistic incident. We consider that in art, there may be artists with different understandings of society, but as artists we are not interested in politics. We are interested in the values of art as such, and in its social value, and in using the right form with which to create, in order to carry out the process of deepening that understanding.⁹

Only later, when Xiao Lu read related coverage of the event, did she realize her new boyfriend had taken co-authorship of the shooting in his statement that she had absent-mindedly co-signed.¹⁰ Tang Song's description of the shooting as a collaborative artwork



FIGURE 2.2 Xiao Lu firing a gun at her art installation *Dialogue*, at the *China Avant-Garde* art exhibition, 1989. Courtesy of artist and Wen Pulin, Archive of Chinese Avant-Garde Art.

circulated widely and became the generally accepted narrative within Chinese art history and criticism (Xiao 2010, viii). The narrative neatly linked the shooting to both a Western ideology of democratic individualism and an Eastern conception of artistic collectivity, achieved through a supposedly collaborative performance.

Despite Tang Song's purported political indifference, others began explaining the motivation for the shooting as linked to the artists' privileged positions. Xiao Lu's parents were prominent socialist realist painters and her father president of the Chinese Art Academy; Tang Song's father was chief of the Zhejiang Military Region. Critics characterized the work as a successful attempt at showcasing the privilege of the artists, who spent only three days in Beijing Eastern District Detention Centre and did not face serious legal repercussions. This story, surfacing just as well-connected officials' children began rising as members of a new elite class in post-Mao China, proved compelling. It pointed to unchecked power of CCP officials and their offspring and served as a juicy indictment of corruption within an authoritarian regime. Simultaneously, the CCP faced challenges from pro-democracy protestors, many of whom were artists, intellectuals, students, and/or recent graduates such as those involved in *China Avant-garde*.

Fifteen years following the exhibition, after Xiao Lu and Tang Song had spent several years living in Australia, returned to the PRC, and broken up, Xiao Lu sought to reclaim sole authorship of *Dialogue* and the shooting. Upon revising her story, however, she met a torrent of criticism. Gao Minglu describes the situation as follows:

Xiao Lu's revision immediately encountered fierce pressure and resistance. She spent a period of great difficulty and could not remain in Beijing ... Her former friends, even her childhood friend, the "young man" who had lent her the gun, abandoned her under great pressure. Xiao Lu was likened to Xianglin's wife in Lu Xun's story *New Year Sacrifice*, a woman who having lost her husband and child becomes mentally disturbed and spends every day complaining nonstop. Nobody seemed to pay any attention to the facts Xiao Lu was telling, but focused on the audacity of her seeking to revise history (Gao 2011, xi).

Xiao Lu faced critiques fueled by a sexist desire to protect the grand historical narrative of Chinese male artists' development of avant-garde art.

Faced with accusations of lying as a woman scorned, Xiao Lu decided to write her account as a novel (Xiao 2010). Fiction, and the use of substituted names (Xiao Xiao for Xiao Lu and Lan Jun for Tang Song) allowed the artist the freedom to share her story of the 1989 shooting and surrounding events without enduring attacks from China's patriarchal artworld and a society reluctant to listen to women. Xiao Lu's 2010 novel, which shares its title with her original artwork *Dialogue*, discusses sexism and sexual assault, while transgressing East/West binaries, revealing how claims of collectivity can be wielded toward self-serving individualist agendas and how artistic individualism often depends on collaborations.

In her novel, Xiao Lu writes of the fallout after she shot *Dialogue* and of ensuing conflicts between herself and Tang Song. In writing art history as a novel that winds around a story of falling in and out of love, the artist-author reveals some of the thorny problems attached to collaboration. Xiao Lu convincingly maintains that she was the only author of *Dialogue* and the shooting, even though Tang Song had accepted credit as co-author. Recognizing individual artistic agency, and how rarely female Chinese artists receive such recognition, Xiao Lu's novel simultaneously highlights the networks on which artists and writers depend. As described in her novel, the first iteration of *Dialogue*, which comprised two phone booths produced for the artist by workers from Hangzhou's Telecommunications Department, was made possible through her father's connections (Xiao 2010, 63–65). A friend of Xiao Lu's, who came from a military family, lent her the gun she used to shoot *Dialogue* (Xiao 2010, ix). Another friend in Australia encouraged her to write her story as a novel, which was translated into English by yet another friend (Xiao 2010, 199–200).

Xiao Lu discusses how the notion of shattering the installation by shooting a gun at it, sparked by a teacher's suggestion, developed alongside her growing anger over a past sexual trauma. *Dialogue*'s protagonist alleges that, as a young woman, she was sexually assaulted and then entered an abusive relationship with one of her parents' closest friends, a much older, more powerful father-like figure who was also a well-known socialist realist painter. She describes the inspiration for her installation: an impromptu phone call made from a payphone to her abuser, who curtly dismisses and hangs up on her, terminating the dialogue (Xiao 2010, 61). Continuously prohibited from engaging in truthful dialogue, especially as a female artist, Xiao Lu ironically turns to fiction to expose the (factual) wrongdoings of those in power.¹¹ Xiao Lu's artwork *Dialogue* heralded by some conservative critics as "the first gunshots of Tiananmen" (Xiao 2010, viii), as well as her story, long kept quiet under an oppressive regime, reverberated during China's tumultuous year of 1989 and beyond.

See What You Can See

Throughout the 1980s, many Chinese artists contributed to and/or gleaned inspiration from the nation's growing pro-democracy movement. Gaining momentum in Chinese cities amidst the nation's loosening of intellectual spheres and increased internationalization, the PRC's post-Mao pro-democracy movement reached an apex with student-initiated, widespread protests that occurred in the summer of 1989, crystallized in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. CCP officials ultimately denounced calls for democracy, violently suppressing protestors on June 4, 1989. Ai Weiwei narrates the events leading up to and of that day:

The sudden death by heart attack of Hu Yaobang, former general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, on April 15, 1989, triggered a power struggle between top leaders who favored political reform and those who tolerated only economic reform. Marches to Tiananmen Square by university students mourning Hu Yaobang soon developed into demonstrations demanding that the government address inflation, unemployment, and corruption and uphold media freedoms, democratic processes, and freedom of assembly. On May 20, martial law was declared in Beijing, and 300,000 troops were deployed. In the early morning of June 4, soldiers armed with assault rifles and live ammunition, supported by armored vehicles and tanks, shot their way along Chang'an Avenue, the main approach road to the square, taking hundreds of innocent lives ... Beijing residents had never imagined that the army would open fire on students peacefully petitioning for policy change ... State violence did not loosen the rulers' hold on power. On the contrary, now they simply gripped their weapons all the more tightly (Ai 2021, 192–193).

Referred to as a "massacre" in US and other non-Chinese media and an "incident" within mainland China, the June 4 crackdown cemented the CCP's vehement authoritarianism following the milder governance of the post-Mao reform era.

While many Chinese students today will have heard of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, through anecdotes passed down privately among family members and trusted friends, the events are seldom discussed in public. Chinese intellectuals have coded terms for referring to the protests, as do dissident netizens, who, depending on education levels, desire, and access, may utilize virtual private networks (VPNs) and other means to get around the PRC's strictly censored Internet. Still, myriad images of pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, whether due to censorship, historical amnesia, and/or general disinterest in the past, remain obscure.

The most iconic images of the protests are rarely seen within mainland China. There is a photograph of Chinese rock musician Cui Jian, who performed on a makeshift stage at

Tiananmen Square wearing a red blindfold. On May 20, 1989, the day CCP officials declared martial law and ordered troops to surround Tiananmen Square, Cui Jian serenaded protestors with his popular song “Nothing to my Name.” While Cui Jian insists the song—about a poor boy begging his girlfriend to accept his love despite his poverty—is apolitical, “Nothing to my Name” conveys a sense of disillusionment as well as hope felt by many Chinese youths in the 1980s and became an unofficial anthem of the protests (Fisher 2013). That same day, Cui Jian also sang “A Piece of Red Cloth,” referencing his red blindfold, a symbol of the PRC’s communist rule and power to blind. Cui Jian’s purposeful obfuscation of sight foreshadowed how the protests and violent response would soon be erased from public view.

Another photograph, taken days after Cui Jian’s performance, shows *The Goddess of Democracy*, a 10-meter-tall statue resembling the Statue of Liberty hoisted above a crowd of protestors and facing off against Tiananmen Square’s permanently installed portrait of Mao flanked by two red banners displaying communist slogans: *Long Live the People’s Republic of China* and *Long Live the Great United People of the World*. Constructed by students at Beijing’s Central Academy of Fine Arts with metal, foam, and papier-mâché, *The Goddess of Democracy* was erected in Tiananmen Square on May 29, 1989, and stood with the protestors symbolizing their dreams of democratic reforms, however quixotically inspired by US ideology (Morris 2019). Five days following *The Goddess of Democracy*’s appearance, People’s Liberation Army soldiers, acting on the orders of CCP officials, shot and killed what has been estimated (though never officially reported) as thousands of protestors. The collectively made *Goddess of Democracy* offered a glimmer of hope prior to the carnage.

Video footage and photographs of an anonymous person who would come to be called “Tank Man” circulated extensively outside of the PRC.¹² In the quiet morning following the shooting of protestors, a lone man, likely returning from a day of shopping, a bag in each hand, stands off against a convoy of tanks near Tiananmen Square. He appears as if dancing with the long line of tanks, stepping to and fro to block their advance. He climbs onto the vehicle closest to him, looks around, and descends. Helmeted heads pop out; an operator waves his arms. As the operators remain in the tanks, the state’s machines seem to subsist without humanity. Civil rights activist Yang Jianli describes “Tank Man” and his actions as a “symbolic, final act of defiance, the last tragic gesture” of the Tiananmen Square protests (Hernández 2019). These images remain haunted by persistent tensions between individuals and state power, and art and authoritarianism.

Pasts, Presents, and Possible Futures Beyond Geopolitical Divisions

In 2008, one year shy of the twentieth anniversary of the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, I spoke with artist Yang Fudong in a café in Shanghai. Yang Fudong, who was born in Beijing, studied art in Hangzhou’s Chinese Art Academy and settled in Shanghai, explained to me what he saw as the primary differences between Beijing and Shanghai’s art scenes: “In Beijing, artists eat together, drink together, live together and make art together. In Shanghai, artists are more independent, more solitary, and there is less of an emphasis on collectivity.”¹³ In short, we summarized, giggling as we recognized our own reductive reasoning: Beijing’s artists seem more communist, Shanghai’s more capitalist. I heard this characterization repeated by many Chinese artists I spoke with in the first decade of the twenty-first century. For artists living in Shanghai, their counterparts in Beijing, the PRC’s political capital, seemed to maintain a more communist ethos in how they lived and worked together. Shanghai, China’s financial center to the south, apparently bred a more independent (Westernized) artist. The Shanghai artist was also said to embody a cosmopolitan, entrepreneurial spirit linked to the city’s history as a semi-colonial treaty port forced open following Britain’s victory in the First Opium War (1839–1842).

Paralleling reductive East/West divisions, categorizations of the apparently politically driven, communist Beijing art collective versus the supposedly commercially driven, capitalist Shanghainese artist reduce the complex terrain of China's vast, hybrid, and extremely diverse culture. In truth, Yang Fudong's photographs and video installations, made collaboratively at the dawn of the twenty-first century, pivot around disaffected intellectuals in post-1980s China, addressing issues of social alienation within a new consumer society and continued tensions between slippery ideas of individuality and collectivity. Photographs such as *Don't Worry, It'll be better* and the series *The First Intellectual* (both from 2000), as well as the artist's five-part video installation *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (2007), showcase loneliness among artists/intellectuals, no matter if they are by themselves or within groups. The figures' environs, markers of the PRC's urbanization and globalization (e.g. quiet bourgeois interiors or secluded streets in Shanghai's financial district surrounded by towers of glass and steel) exacerbate, or even cause individuals' isolation.

Xiao Lu describes the altered landscape following her return from Australia in 1997:

We discovered that China had undergone a great internal change. Under Deng Xiaoping's liberalizing reform policies, the greatest change was that many people had become rich ... Everything was changing, and the speed of change was scary. Over large areas, buildings were demolished and their occupants moved ... The enormous material changes changed people's way of thinking. When old friends got together, they couldn't speak three words without mentioning cars, houses or money (Xiao 2010, 156).

Xiao Lu's words, like Yang Fudong's images, speak to the difficulties facing artists in post-1980s China, when vapid materialism largely replaced both the utopian idealism of the Mao Era and the '85 New Wave and pro-democracy movements.

In US classrooms, I learned about the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as a pivotal moment signaling the widespread victory of capitalist democracy over socialist communism. History teachers taught that the fall of the Berlin Wall and decline of East Germany in 1989 marked the conclusion of decades of a post-WWII Cold War defined by the world's primary competing ideologies: US-allied democratic capitalism and Soviet Union-allied communist socialism. Seldom discussed, not in US classrooms nor in Chinese ones, the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and CCP officials' violent crackdown carry grave significance in relation to the overlooked histories and today's renewed legacies of the Cold War.

Today, we find ourselves living amidst a perilous rise in racist nationalisms, including in two of the world's most powerful nations: the United States and PRC. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed globalization's harsh realities—our interdependencies, and the ease with which people and governments resort to scapegoating and the erection of hostile borders. In the United States, the spread of COVID-19 inspired a toxic wave of anti-Asian sentiment, targeting people perceived to be of Chinese descent, but with violent threats extending to all Asians and Asian Americans. Amidst this surge in anti-Asian hate and as tensions between the United States and China rise, we sorely need more nuanced understandings of China's twentieth-century sociopolitical, cultural, and artistic developments.

Now more than ever, we need to look at art and listen to artists, many of whom have been silenced, across generations and mythical but nonetheless hardening East/West geopolitical divides. I hope that this chapter, like the book that contains it, may help spark a *dialogue*, to redeploy Xiao Lu's title, a cross-cultural dialogue we so desperately need. As international tensions rise and nationalist and fascist attitudes spread, transnational dialogues between artists and intellectuals offer nuanced critical perspectives, varied approaches to critiquing oppressive power structures, and creative modes of resistance that should be shared around the world.

Notes

- 1 Throughout this chapter, I introduce Chinese names with the pinyin Romanization system following mainland Chinese conventions with surnames before given names (e.g. Xiao Lu, Xiao is surname; Lu is given name), except in cases when people themselves use different conventions (e.g. Xiongya Gao, a scholar based in the United States; Gao is surname). When I discuss people outside mainland China, I employ their own local conventions and/or the names they themselves use (e.g. Chin-tao Wu, a scholar based in Taiwan; Chin-tao is given name and follows the Wade-Giles Romanization system typically used in Taiwan; Wu is surname).
- 2 See, amongst others, comprehensive analyses of contemporary Chinese art in the post-Mao Era in Wu (2014).
- 3 China's Republican Era was a tumultuous period marked by the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), China's last imperial dynasty; colonialist expansion and incursions in China by foreign powers including British, French, US, German, and Japanese; the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945); and civil war between Republican China's Nationalists versus Communists, with Communists taking control of mainland China and establishing the People's Republic of China in 1949. For examples of cross-cultural modern art in Republican China, see works by, amongst others, The Storm Society (1929–1932), China's first self-proclaimed avant-garde art and design collective. The Storm Society, founded by Parisian educated artist Pang Xunqin and Tokyo educated artist and writer Ni Yide, aimed to hybridize European, Chinese and Shanghai-based aesthetics and artistic approaches. The Storm Society dissolved amidst the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). Many of the members such as Pang Xunqin, who was branded as a rightist and stripped from his post at the art and design academy he helped form, faced severe restrictions during the Cultural Revolution. For further discussion of hybrid modernisms in Republican China, especially Shanghai, considered as mainland China's most modern metropolis, see Danzker, Lum and Zheng (2004), Lee (1999) and Lin (2019a).
- 4 At the 1942 Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art, Mao Zedong famously declared: "[t]here is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics" (Mao 1980, 299). After establishing the PRC in 1949, Mao Zedong and other CCP leaders upheld socialist realism as the new nation's official style, fostered through educational exchanges with Soviet artists and institutions. Artist Dong Xiwen's *The Founding Ceremony* (1953) epitomizes the PRC's new art. The oil painting depicts Chairman Mao Zedong delivering his October 1, 1949, inaugural speech in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Measuring 230 × 402 centimeters (approximately 7 ½ × 13 feet), the massive painting showcases Maoist art ideals: heroization of Mao Zedong, monumental representation of CCP victory, and easily legible style. The setting, Tiananmen Square, has long been a site of public uprisings. In 1919, protestors in the square called for an end to foreign imperialism and progressive revisions to China's traditionalism during what would come to be called the May 4th, or New Culture, Movement. *The Founding Ceremony*, reproduced on posters that circulated all over China, became one of the most recognizable images of what the CCP hailed as the post-liberation nation. Significantly for thinking through the PRC's entanglement of art and politics, *The Founding Ceremony* had to be repainted numerous times as certain politicians standing with Mao Zedong fell out of favor. Comparing two versions—the original from 1953 and one from 1972—we observe leaders such as Gao Gang and Liu Shaoqi vanish. These versions reveal how CCP officials (like many powerful patrons and institutions throughout art's histories) altered and instrumentalized art to further political goals and rewrite history.
For further analyses of art and cultural policies under Mao Zedong, see, amongst others, Andrews (1994) and Zheng and Chiu (2008).
- 5 Depending on who you speak to or which sources you read, the Cultural Revolution may be regarded as having been a liberating experiment allowing for the realization of a progressive conception of anti-elitist artistic collectivity, or a reactionary break in the development of

Chinese art characterized by fascistic destruction. For additional investigations of the art and visual culture of China's Cultural Revolution, see Laing (1998) and Lin (2019b).

- 6 See related accounts of violence against, and public shaming and exiling of artists during the Cultural Revolution in Andrews (1994), Laing (1998), and Ai (2021). Mao Zedong, as well as the PRC's more moderate leader, Zhou Enlai, both died in 1976. Collective mourning for Zhou turned towards a public call to hold Mao's wife and three allies, collectively deemed the "Gang of Four," accountable for the violence and destruction of the Cultural Revolution. The members of the "Gang of Four"—Jiang Qing (born Li Shumeng, 1914–1991), Yao Wenyan (1931–2005), Zhang Chunqiao (1917–2005), and Wang Hongwen (1935–1992)—were imprisoned, bringing a close to the decade of Cultural Revolution.
- 7 See exceptional coverage of female and gender-fluid artists in recent books including Welland (2018) and Davidson (2020).
- 8 Xueping Zhong (2010, 227) writes: "Women can hold up half the sky is a Mao-era phrase that most people have assumed to be a direct quote from Mao. The interesting truth is that it is actually not clear where and when Mao said or wrote it and, for that matter, whether or not it was a direct quote."
- 9 Xiao and Song (2010), ix.
- 10 See Xiao Lu's description of events following the shooting, matching her recollections relayed to Gao Minglu in Xiao (2010, 105–108).
- 11 Sexual assaults and abusive relationships, including within governmental institutions, remain all too common. The world was recently confronted with present-day occurrences of this kind in the PRC when top Chinese tennis athlete, Peng Shuai, "described her alleged assault ... at the hands of one of the country's most powerful Communist Party officials at the time" (Feng 2021).
- 12 Photographers and filmmakers, including Charlie Cole, Stuart Franklin, and Jeff Widener, captured and helped circulate the now iconic images of "Tank Man." See Almond (2022).
- 13 Yang Fudong, in conversation with author, September 13, 2008, Shanghai, China.

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1990–2000

Is There a Line that Connects All Things? Artist Statement

Sutapa Biswas

I am a British conceptual artist. Born in Shantinikethan, India, in 1962, I have lived and been educated in Britain since I was four years of age. The whole of life is a stage and the work I make moves across a range of media incorporating painting, drawing, film, digital video, photography, performance, and installation. *For me, there is a line that connects it all. I call it time and space.*

Described as visually impactful, challenging, and poetic, my works are inspired by literature, art history, film, the everyday, and the autobiographical. Shaped by my observations about the relationships between people and the places they live in, I am especially drawn to the ways in which larger historical narratives collide with personal narratives. Underpinned by my interest in colonial histories and how this relates to questions of subjectivity, gender, race, and class, my works are nuanced by the ways in which oral narratives reveal the human condition, their relationship to our collective histories and to questions of time and space. As the author and art critic Laura Cumming writes of my work: “Biswas has a poet’s gift for [...] contemplative echoes and metaphors” (Cumming 2021). Through layered juxtapositions, my works frequently tell unsettling truths, addressing the complex legacies of colonial histories and the impact of these on everyday life.

I graduated with a BA in Fine Art with Art History from Leeds University in 1985, after which I completed my postgraduate degree at the Slade School of Art in 1990 followed by a stint as a research student at the Royal College of Art from 1995 to 1998. In terms of the development of my work as an artist more broadly speaking, it is perhaps worth noting that the department in which I completed my undergraduate degree was established by the renowned art historian T. J. Clark and supported a distinctive program that integrated theories of art history and the practice of art in a critique of modernism, predominantly grounded in historical materialism. Feminist art history, led by my tutor Griselda Pollock, played a vital role in the developing discourses at Leeds and beyond. Being immersed in this academic environment was inspiring but, in spite of it being a seemingly radical program, there were glaring absences. In one of my first lectures, for example, I encountered J. M. W. Turner’s *The Slave Ship* (1840) and was surprised that, whilst Turner’s choice of palette and the atmospherics of the painting were elaborated upon, there was no discussion around the bodies visible in the water and how

they came to be there. From term one, as Pollock has recounted, through dialogue with my tutors, written art history assignments, and studio practice, I critically challenged the Eurocentric limits of the curriculum, which thereafter saw some change (Pollock 2004, 24). Within my studio practice, I began interweaving mainstream modernist art historical references with iconography from outside of this framework; this strategy became an important part of my working process that allowed me to challenge the colonial canon of art's histories. This is evident in my video piece *Kali* (1983–1985), in which Pollock appears (now in the Tate Collection), and in my painting *Housewives with Steak-knives* (1983–1985), in the collection of the Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, both made whilst I was an undergraduate at Leeds.

As Pollock writes of this period of my work: “[l]ong before decolonizing the curriculum became an international issue, [Sutapa Biswas] challenged us to think about race and gender through challenging but always artistically stunning works” (Pollock’s statement in Mitchell 2020). Following my undergraduate degree, both works were exhibited in the landmark 1985 Institute of Contemporary Art exhibition *Thin Black Line* curated by the artist Lubaina Himid, leading to my recognition as a key figure within the British Black Arts Movement.

In a UK context, to better understand much of the art and art practice that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, it is important to consider the socioeconomic and political contexts of the preceding decades. Recovering from the aftermath of WWII, Britain was beginning to come to terms with the demise of its colonial empire. Migrant communities drawn from Britain’s former colonies to rebuild Britain’s infrastructures and economy drew the ire of racist politicians such as Enoch Powell, whose divisive 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech, strongly arguing against immigration, served as a clarion call to fascists demanding the repatriation of Black and Brown workers. It was against this backdrop of toxic, oppressive right-wing politics that Britain witnessed race riots in the 1970s and the Thatcherite 1980s. In my suburb of London, for example, following racist provocations by fascist groups, the local migrant youth in Southall burned down the Hamborough Tavern in 1981. A few months later, the metaphorical embers still burning, I began my undergraduate course in Leeds.

I am the daughter of Indian parents who were born in what was at the time British India, which, following Partition under the British Raj, became East Pakistan and today is known as Bangladesh. My parents were raised in an India under colonial rule where they were schooled



FIGURE 3.1 Sutapa Biswas, *Synapse II*, 1987–1992. Hand-printed black and white photograph (two part work), 1120 × 1300 millimeters each. © Sutapa Biswas. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2022.

in the English language, a context wherein speaking in their mother-tongue in public places was a punishable offense. Partition of India was violent and resulted in the genocide of millions through forced displacement. From a geography their families had inhabited for generations, when the country won its independence from British colonial rule, my parents were forcibly displaced to West Bengal. India, in this moment of post-Partition, saw continued turbulence. My father, an academic and Marxist, had strong disagreements with Indian National Congress (the dominant Congress Party of that time), and because of continued persecution he left India under difficult circumstances, finding passage to England in 1965. Six months later, my mother—leaving her home and loved ones behind—and we five children traveled from West Bengal to Bombay (now Mumbai) to board one of the last passenger ships to travel to England via the Suez Canal. Life in England proved to be complex.

My first encounter with art was indirectly through my mother. Aged about four, on one occasion I had witnessed her standing in front of her bedroom window reading letters. Written on blue aerograms, these were letters from home. Framed by the incoming light, wearing a fine silk blue sari with silver threading, one of the few she had brought with her to England, she wept. At around age five, I encountered a reproduction of Vermeer's painting *Woman Reading a Letter*, circa 1663, and it took me back to this moment of having watched my mother. Years later, as an undergraduate student at Leeds, I revisited Vermeer's painting. Deconstructing its symbolism, I realized that the map represented on the wall alluded to the then expanding Dutch empire in great part through the global expansion of the Dutch East India Company. Lapis from Afghanistan, a pigment used by Vermeer to depict the indigo cloth and silks of the furnishings and costumes in his work, had come from the wider region of what at the time was a contested terrain and part of Greater India and the Indosphere.¹ From the Middle Ages to around 1750, the eastern regions of Afghanistan such as Kabulistan and Zabulistan (now Kabul, Kandahar, and Ghazni) were recognized as being part of the Indian subcontinent (Al-Hind), while its western parts were included in Khorasan, Tokharistan, and Sistan.² The establishment of the Dutch East India Company in India pre-dates the "founding" of Afghanistan as a nation state/kingdom.

For me, Vermeer's blue is the line that connects the past to the present; the line that connected my mother's blue sari to the blue of the seascape we crossed by ship from India to England; the line that is blue that connects me to art.³ In 1996, I made a video piece titled *Untitled (Woman in Blue Weeping)* that referenced this ongoing connection between the symbolism of color and my personal narrative. Exhibited as part of a landmark exhibition situated across many sites in the King's Cross and Euston areas of London—curated by Zoe Shearman



FIGURE 3.2 Sutapa Biswas, *Lumen*, 2021. Production Still. Colour C-Type print, 918 × 1350 millimeters. © Sutapa Biswas. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2022.

and Tom Trevor with Gilane Tawardros at the Institute of International Visual Arts (Iniva)—my video was situated in the beadle’s box overlooking the preserved remains of Jeremy Bentham at University College, London, where I had formerly been a postgraduate student.

Around the same time that the radical London-based arts organization Iniva was established in 1996, Britain was witnessing the aggressive marketization of the cultural sector and the visual arts.⁴ A leading proponent of this was the collector Charles Saatchi, who had previously been part of the Saatchi and Saatchi duo behind the advertising campaign that brought the far-right Margaret Thatcher into power as prime minister in 1979. Championed by Saatchi and driven by market forces, Britain’s hot art marketplace saw a shift in focus away from art practices that were more closely aligned with radical issue-based works such as feminist art practices and the work of Black British Arts Movement artists. Heavily propped up by right-wing and neoliberal interests, the British art galleries increasingly supported more market-driven artists such as those in the Young British Artists group—most of whom were white. Meanwhile, the fact that the Turner Prize (the most important national award for contemporary art) was given to two Black artists—Chris Ofili in 1998 and Steve McQueen in 1999—prompted informal conversations within the broader mainstream that promoted the view that systemic racism within the arts in the United Kingdom was now a thing of the past, drawing attention away from (subsuming) the radical historic contexts out of which the Black British Arts Movement had originally grown.

While on some levels this era was a battleground and surviving it was a feat, artists such as myself more closely associated with a radical practice had success by continuing to network nationally and internationally, exhibiting our works both within and beyond the United Kingdom. In 1998, for example, Yale University Art Gallery (on the East Coast of the United States) hosted *The Unmapped Body: 3 Black British Artists*. Curated by Daphne Deeds and Ian Baucom, this exhibition brought together works by myself, Sonia Boyce, and Keith Piper. And the curatorial projects of Iniva, exhibitions organized by curators such as Eddie Chambers and Sunil Gupta, and radical publications like the journal *Third Text*, founded in 1987 by Rasheed Araeen, were significant to creating spaces for a counterculture.

As an artist, I have continued to exhibit my works widely, but in a UK context, it was to be another sixteen years before I saw my next major solo exhibition.

Notes

- 1 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_India, accessed on May 16, 2023.
- 2 See History of Afghanistan - Wikipedia, accessed on May 16, 2023.
- 3 My interest in Vermeer and the color blue is discussed in Pollock (2004, 22–24).
- 4 Iniva published the book *Sutapa Biswas*, which accompanied my 2004 *Birdsong* exhibition in London and Portland, Oregon.

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Why Contemporary Art Is Post-Soviet

Angela Harutyunyan

This chapter presents the argument that the constitution of “global contemporary art” as a set of institutional practices in the 1990s encompassing biennials, art fairs, festivals, the expansion of the art market and increasing precarity for artists and cultural workers requires a historicization of its advent from a Soviet perspective. Ultimately, it is the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the disintegration of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) that are often considered the “primal scene” of the globalization of contemporary art. But as with all primal scenes, this one needed to be repressed as well. No theoretical account of contemporary art in recent years has taken the Soviet historical experience seriously. However, to a large extent, the historicization of global contemporary art from a Soviet perspective reveals that this art is the offspring of the anti-Soviet cultural sphere. In the post-Soviet condition, it still carries with it a strong anti-Soviet consciousness. Hence, it comfortably aligns itself with neoliberalism as the ideology and ethics of the late capitalist free-market economy, as the latter was spreading in the post-Soviet sphere in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet socialist state with its centrally planned economy.

Contemporary art as a mode of artistic production, following the logic of transnational capital, seems to transcend national contexts and present the artworld in the image of networks of celebrity artists and curators. But if we start paying attention to the concrete and historically specific contexts of the emergence of the discourse and practice of “contemporary art”—something that becomes possible from the standpoint of the global contemporary—we encounter a different picture. In various contexts, the institutionalization of contemporary art is constituted through a political economy of culture that is not strictly speaking capitalist, such as in the Soviet Union, and is mediated through national and supranational forms, styles, schools, and discourses. If, for instance, the *Documenta* exhibition establishes a paradigm of contemporary art in 1950s West Germany and Western Europe in the post-WWII context of reconstruction and capitalist re-modernization, in Latin America, contemporary art is the post-1960s’ art in the wake of state-led modernization projects (Benezra 2021). In the Middle East, contemporary art can be traced to the mid-1990s and its entry into international circulation is seen in the early 2000s, triggered by 9/11 and the US cultural interest in the Middle East. In various contexts within the region, the impetus for contemporary art’s institutionalization is also varied. In Lebanon, it

is the art of post-civil war memory financed by the local elites and international foundations.¹ Since the early 2000s contemporary art in Egypt has designated NGO-funded art presented in a global artistic context, as opposed to the sprawling bureaucracy of state-financed art designated as conservative and outmoded. Finally, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, it is the monarchic United Arab Emirates that provides a vast infrastructure for the circulation and representation of regional and global contemporary art.² The historical and conceptual understanding of global contemporary art thus requires that we juxtapose a historical gaze from a concrete context with the systematizing, spatially grounded perspective of the transnational operations of global contemporaneity.

“Global” Contemporary Art and the Vestiges of Soviet Modernity

In 2015, a famous European curator was invited by an Armenian-Russian oligarch-philanthropist to set up an institution of contemporary art in Dilijan, a mountainous town in Armenia.³ Inspired by his Russian compatriots sponsoring glittery exhibitions in eminent biennials and probably driven by patriotic feelings for staging his contribution to the art world in his home country, the patron gave *carte blanche* to the curator to create her own *mise-en-scène*, to bring the world to the town and the town to the world through contemporary art. Dilijan was being revived as a site of tourist attraction through a typical neoliberal combination of private education, creative industries, and finance, where contemporary art promised to be the research and experimental avant-garde of neoliberalization.

The town that nestled among gorgeous forests had been a post-Soviet outpost prior to the same oligarch’s efforts to establish an international school there. The headquarters of financial institutions soon followed suit along with hospitality enterprises. Famed for its once flourishing resorts, cultural centers, libraries, and a factory for robotic technology in use up until the disintegration of the USSR, Dilijan in the post-Soviet period throughout the 1990s was a symptomatic site, revealing the contradictions of the new era. Hard hit by the collapse of the Soviet modernization project and experiencing the shock of the free-market economy that brought about the disintegration of centralized Soviet infrastructure, social welfare system, unemployment, poverty, and urban degeneration, many of Dilijan’s inhabitants had become only temporary visitors to their own hometown, having spent most of the year doing seasonal work in various locations in Russia.

Dilijan’s flagship factory of robotic technology remained, now dysfunctional as a derelict monument to the bygone project of the Soviet state, which had aimed to combine science and technology and bring about a brighter future. The empty factory with its gigantic halls and bright offices became an attractive site for the curator. The abandoned machinery, only a fraction of which escaped the fate of much of the industrial technology in the immediate years after the collapse of the USSR (much of which was ravaged and sold as raw material to the neighboring countries), added to the charm of the place. The curator invited participants from all over the world to occupy the factory and organize an active and diverse research-oriented program that lasted several weeks from April to August in 2018 and culminated in a festival.

The curatorial aim was both archaeological and ethnographic: to uncover and present in contemporary artistic form an indigenous Dilijan, an uncontaminated locality with its inhabitants seeped in transhistorical wisdom and endowed with know-how inaccessible to those in the deskilled and alienated post-industrial late capitalist West. But ironically, this “nativization” was launched from a site that was itself post-industrial and carried the traces of the Soviet modernization project. The curatorial transference of imagining a non-alienated harmony between man and nature in Dilijan backfired because the inhabitants—former scientists, engineers, industrial workers, and now a disillusioned army of the

unemployed—showed little interest in ethnographic self-discoveries through video, installation, sound art, and other means that did not speak to their immediate reality and, from their perspective, the media neither constituted fine arts nor productive work. Their own counter-transference was constituted in hopes that the curator, along with the group of artists, was to relaunch the factory and provide them with jobs.⁴ This missed encounter, made visible several contradictions at play in contemporary art in the post-Soviet condition—contradictions that are embedded in the structural operations of global contemporary art as it expands toward hitherto “undiscovered” spheres and spaces. I believe that these operations can be acutely recognized in the peripheries of global contemporary art because the encounter between the *modus operandi* of global contemporary art (with its “spirit” of abstract universality and ahistoricity) and the peripheries of late capitalism reveals that there exist heterogeneous temporalities within capitalism itself as these temporalities are being subsumed within the logic of capital. In a way, this encounter with a periphery may show the processes of subsumption under a magnifying glass.

What does the Dilijan Observatory project reveal about contemporary art in the post-Soviet condition? For funding, the production of contemporary art relies exclusively on private or NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) money; it replaces the formerly state-secure and publicly remunerated labor of the artist with temporary, situational, and precarious opportunities for the production and representation of work (available only if they know how to write a grant application or appear in a curator’s radar);⁵ in its form of production, contemporary art utilizes trans-disciplinary tools and media opened by the expanded field of postmodernism. However, it often seeks a supposedly premodern subject to reveal an imagined outside to this very hyper-technologized world, often resulting in works that are ethnographic in content and contemporary in artistic form. Contemporary art, in the post-Soviet context, was born out of anti-Soviet consciousness and attitudes carried forth into the age of the triumph of global capitalism and liberal democracy in the 1990s in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR. Contemporary art practices often came to fetishize the debris left behind by the so-called workers’ state while erasing the Soviet experience as a historically lived past (for example, the factory at Dilijan as a signifier of Soviet modernity didn’t really figure in the curatorial framework).

Whether we consider contemporary art as an institution delivering a cultural infrastructure of global neoliberalism, or the *Zeitgeist* of the new epoch of hyper-globalization, or the cultural logic of late capitalism, or that which cements a mode of artistic labor as increasingly precarious, contemporary art in the post-Soviet context is the art of “the post-Socialist transition” (Esanu 2013) and ideologically it serves as a signifier of the erasure of Soviet modernity. The “contemporary” in “contemporary art” squeezes out and ejects the temporality of the Soviet project of modernity in the collapsed present of the permanent now.⁶ If Soviet modernity had a temporal arrow directed to the future, to the anticipation of a classless society without social antagonism, the permanent now of the contemporary presents the ideology that the capitalist mode of production is natural, permanent, and ahistorical. This ideology forecloses any possibility for revolutionary change and transformation. Contemporary art, in turn, culturally cements the inevitability of the market economy and Western liberalism in the post-Soviet sphere. As Octavian Esanu claims, contemporary art is the product of post-Socialist transition that witnessed the dismantling of public institutions, the privatization of the hitherto public assets and property, and the tsunami-like launch of a market economy. However contemporary art in the former Soviet context didn’t only, and suddenly, arrive on the wings of neoliberalism in the 1990s with the subsumption of the Soviet sphere into a market economy. Contemporary art had also been prepared in the interstices of Soviet history itself, wherein the identification of the Soviet experience with Stalinism had paved the way for anti-Soviet consciousness and triumphantly launched this world into the free world of market economy and liberal democracy (Harutyunyan 2021; see also Azatyan 2018). This runs counter to the dominant theorizations of contemporary

art as a global paradigm that suddenly spring up in 1989.⁷ Instead, more adequate is an approach that comes to terms with a dialectic of rupture and continuity in the advent of contemporary art in the post-Soviet condition: while it was being institutionalized in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR and was made possible by the spread of market capitalism and liberal democracy in the former Soviet sphere, contemporary art as a mode of artistic production had been fermenting in the interstices of the Soviet cultural sphere since the 1960s.⁸ Attention to the concrete contexts of the emergence of contemporary art globally, such as the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts, will reveal that the processes of its institutionalization are neither synchronous nor homogenous.⁹

Art and Labor

The 1965 Soviet animated short film *Boniface's Vacation* (directed by Fyodor Khitruk) is about a circus lion who wants to go on holiday. An exemplary worker, he applies to the circus director for leave to visit his grandmother in Africa. All along the way to the much dreamed about vacation, our banana-loving lion imagines himself lounging on the beach under the rays of the African sun, swimming in the lake and catching the golden fish. Upon his arrival at the village, he encounters children for whom he ends up performing circus tricks. Day after day, the lion spends his vacation in an open-air self-employed circus, entertaining the children and forgetting about the lake, the beach, the banana, even the golden fish until the imminent end of the vacation and his departure. A circus actor in professional life and a circus actor during his vacation, Boniface embodies the communist promise of the non-alienated labor of the artist, or rather, art as a means of de-alienation, which is identical to communism. The de-alienation of the artist signifies the de-alienation of the public whose enjoyment the artist enjoys. In a communist society, art's affirmative relation to culture harbors the promise of bridging the distinction between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*—the active life of the citizen and the life of the mind. Art as a mode of the externalization of aesthetic sensibilities through play performs an active role in shaping an understanding of labor as such as a mode of play. Of course, this promise of de-alienation harbors utopian elements, but it is also grounded in an ideological assumption that the happy lion embodies the average Soviet citizen who experiences the work in the factory and the kolkhoz (collective farm) as aesthetic play.

Now, let's imagine that the circus dissolves because of an economic and political crisis. Boniface is now unemployed. He is still enjoying performing tricks for the children in his neighborhood with the freedom to choose any trick he wants without the directives of his boss. But he is also forced to sell tobacco in the underground metro station, borrow money from friends and neighbors, and sell his jewelry to buy food and pay his bills. His tricks become eccentric: for instance, he pours a bucket of paint on the canvas lying horizontally, he finds discarded objects from the garbage bin and displays them in his window, and he photographs his naked body as a site marked by social antagonism and political violence. Children engage with his art less and less and his public now mostly consists of similar formerly employed circus actors. Occasionally, our Boniface, now a free but ultimately marginal artist in a democratic state, fills in grant applications to produce his eccentric tricks and receives curators in his studio to win opportunities to perform in international festivals.

This juxtaposition of a Soviet and imaginary post-Soviet Boniface makes it possible to offer a dialectical reading of artistic labor under socialism as a promise of de-alienation of labor in the broader social sphere and the ultimate failure of this promise in the post-Soviet condition in the 1990s, signaling the institutionalization of this precarious artistic labor as contemporary art. In the cultural sphere, with the demise of the artist as a wage laborer for specifically artistic production,¹⁰ artists are released from centralized state structures as producers of cultural commodities, but they are also deprived of their formative roles of

cultivating taste and building consciousness.¹¹ In a sense, the post-Soviet condition that arrives upon the ruins of the “workers’ state” makes visible through their utmost sharpest contours two key processes that characterize global contemporary art as a mode of production—the precarization of artistic labor along with productive labor, which is now dependent upon grants and fees, and the increasing marginalization of the artistic sphere from public life, where contemporary artists become their own publics.¹² If seen from within Boniface’s context, there is also a third important aspect of the global contemporary invisible from the latter’s standpoint: Boniface is known in the global art circuits but he is barely known in his national context. He doesn’t teach at the Academy of Fine Arts and doesn’t hold exhibitions in the still persisting Artists’ Union. If he were to, he would be invisible to the global art circuit.

Firstly, an argument can be made that the processes of precarization, combined with local marginalization and global circulation that characterize contemporary art in the post-Soviet sphere, did not appear immediately and suddenly but had been evolving from within the Soviet cultural sphere since the Thaw, an era of relative liberalization of Soviet culture succeeding Nikita Khrushchev’s denunciation of the Stalinist crimes at the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1956. However, the conditions of possibility for the formation of this sphere have been constructed during the Stalinization of the 1930s. Secondly, contemporary art within the post-Soviet condition essentially encapsulates anti-Soviet consciousness. Contemporary art is always already anti-Soviet and post-Soviet at the same time. The coupling of the analyses of artistic labor with contemporary art’s ideological foundations makes it possible to paint a complex historical picture of the process of the advent of contemporary art as institution in post-Socialism and to describe the ways in which it lent itself to easy subsumption to the logic of the market in the 1990s. Therefore, a brief historical detour to the formative moments for Soviet culture is necessary to demonstrate the historical conditions of the formation of the anti-Soviet sphere preparing the ground for the institutionalization of contemporary art.

Two Spheres of Culture within the Soviet “Monoculture”

The construction of the Soviet cultural apparatus throughout the Stalinist 1930s with the same tempo as the construction of the economic infrastructure that had been taking place since the late 1920s,¹³ the rapid imposition of the synthetic cultural politics of Socialist Realism throughout the decade, and the ever-ongoing role of cultural workers as “engineers of human souls,” as Stalin put it,¹⁴ ultimately brought about a subculture resisting this very regulated cultural sphere of production. This subculture since the 1960s, as an effect of de-Stalinization in the proceeding decade, launched by Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 “secret speech,”¹⁵ imagined the outside of the tightly regulated state culture in the ideal of an artist as bearer of a unique subjectivity, often an anarcho-individualist hippie.

This ideal was diametrically opposed to the Socialist Realist laboring artist receiving state commissions. Executing state commissions often entailed performing a *khaltura*, which in Russian has a dual meaning: both as side work performed in addition to a main occupation and as defective work performed carelessly, and often involving multiple reproductions of auratic artworks representing Soviet heroes. Instead, the unofficial artist is freed from any social imperatives, including the need to work. This artist reveals his subjectivity as totally oppositional to Soviet culture with freedom being the content of this opposition. In turn, freedom was being expressed through artistic media and style, signs and signifiers, references and symbols that denoted the “free world” beyond the Iron Curtain. If the state-employed official artist received a salary, acted as a bureaucrat in running cultural and educational institutions, occasionally received holiday packages and checks for a refrigerator, car, furniture, etc., the non-official artist typically performed a job outside the cultural

sphere while acting as a free artist outside of the working hours regulated by the state. At times, one artist would combine the two—official and non-official roles: as a state employee receiving commissions for propaganda/public art, and as a “free” non-official artist who creates work outside the state/public dictate. The first sphere ultimately stemmed from the *proletkult* (proletarian culture) of the 1920s that launched a frontal offensive against the contemplative attitude in art, in service of building proletarian consciousness and bridging the gap between art and life inflicted by the bourgeois mode of production. Institutionalized throughout the 1930s through the centralization of creative collectives in all-Soviet and republican unions, *proletkult*’s belief that consciousness could be molded triumphed as the kernel of Stalin’s and Andrei Zhdanov’s cultural politics of the 1930s.

The second—the non-official—artistic sphere was a byproduct of Khrushchev’s program of de-Stalinization and the Thaw since 1956, which opened a space for the relative liberalization of culture. The second sphere reinstated the bourgeois distinction between necessity and freedom—between alienated socially productive cultural labor and autonomous art, uniform masses, and the unique subjectivity of the creative artist—within the confines of the Soviet state. Bourgeois culture returns as the repressed strata of Soviet historical experience grounded in anti-Sovietism, but this culture was a specifically *Soviet* bourgeois culture: two cultures co-exist within the supposed ideological monoculture. The second sphere, in my view, is not external to but internal to Soviet cultural politics. It was this second, repressed sphere that would triumph from within the contradictions of the Soviet cultural politics in the 1990s as contemporary art while the institutions, established throughout the formation of Socialist Realism such as museums, academies of fine arts, artists’ unions, etc., would prevail in local contexts now clothed in nationalist rhetoric and form. Because Soviet culture more than the economic sphere of production and the political sphere of ideology contained both state socialist and bourgeois elements, the transformations of the artistic mode of production from the late Soviet to the post-Soviet period can be taken as both symptomatic and diagnostic of the post-Socialist condition and of global contemporary art. This is because art’s ultimately irreconcilable relationship to other spheres of social life under Soviet socialist alienation makes visible, in the sharpest way possible, the painful failure of the communist promise of de-alienation within state socialism. This very failure becomes the precondition for the uncritical acceptance of market capitalism that brings about precarity in artistic and productive labor alike.

The two worlds of Soviet cultural production—the official and the oppositional one—had a momentary but ultimately failed opportunity to merge in the short decade of the 1980s during the *perestroika* (the restructuring of the economic and political system). The policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* (the opening of information and government) introduced by the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, in the mid-1980s both exacerbated and made visible the contradictions of the Soviet political economy, the one-party state apparatus, and cultural politics alike. *Glasnost* legitimized and provided a state-sanctioned platform for semi-official and unofficial artists and intellectuals of the so-called second cultural sphere. Now, the formerly repressed cultural discourses came to occupy an avant-garde position within a public sphere opened by the Soviet state itself. As the cultural avant-garde of the *perestroika*, the unofficial artists and intellectuals developed signs, lifestyles, and political ideals signifying the non-Soviet, first within the framework of the reforming state apparatus, and ultimately outside of it. A diverse arsenal of references was mobilized as a means of overcoming the Soviet cultural politics with its calcified and overly bureaucratized structures, a project that the *perestroika* and *glasnost* themselves had undertaken. This was a short-lived moment when the second culture made a claim to formulating a public discourse but it did so by identifying Stalinism with the Soviet historical experience as such—an identification that would conjoin the post-Cold war ideology of rendering the Soviet a monolithic entity and an evil that is past.¹⁶ *Perestroika* was intended to overcome the demons of the Soviet system, and of Stalinism in particular, through

publicly orchestrated collective exorcism. However, this exorcism turned Soviet history into a double ghost: as a historical experience this history had already been rendered spectral by Stalinism; whereas *perestroika* was fighting this very ghost produced by Stalinism. It is rather telling that death, the netherworld, the uncanny cohabitation of the living and the dead as signifiers of the decaying communist project, and the disintegrating Soviet ideology became frequent figures in the art practices of the *perestroika* and post-Soviet periods.

Of the Ghosts and Zombies of Anti-Sovietism

In mid-1980s' St. Petersburg, Yevgeniy Yufit, Alexander Maslov, Aleksei Tolstoy, and several others started a cinema movement they named necrorealism. Their productions, which borrowed from the aesthetics of *film noir*, were based on various macabre rituals performed in nature by “specialists,” be those party bureaucrats, doctors, or scientists. In these films, nature and bureaucracy came together in the uncanny figure of the undead dead. In Yufit's 1991 feature film *Daddy, Father Frost is Dead* (*Papa, Umer Ded Moroz*) the dead are playing the living playing dead. A city dweller—either a scientist or an engineer, a fact that can be discerned from his “intellectual” look and the way he struggles to give rational explanations to rather irrational phenomena—sets on a journey to the countryside to visit his supposed half-brother (see Figure 4.1). Already on the way, he encounters living beings that look dead and dead beings that come to life. The coordinates of his known world progressively disintegrate once he arrives at the village: first as an observer, then, unwittingly, as a participant, he encounters murder, incest, and homosexuality—“perversions” buried beneath mundane reality and covered up by ideology. The latter here is embodied in the figures of elderly men in official suits and ties who orchestrate macabre rituals. These figures, signifying the Politburo (the policymaking committee of the communist party) with their age and attire, spring up as if from out of nowhere, coming through the forest and persecuting the protagonist. In Yufit's film, the only active force in this world of the dead



FIGURE 4.1 Evgeniy Yufit, director, *Daddy, Father Frost is Dead*, 1991 (1 hour 13 minutes), film still. Courtesy of Timothy Yufit.

who are undead and the living who are dead is death itself. But since death here is equated with ideology-turned-nature, the only survivor is ideology without recourse to reality.

The figure of death as both a signifier of ideological decay and a material substance that gives life to a counter-cultural sphere is enacted in a *happening* by a group of unofficial artists in 1988 in Soviet Armenia. But as opposed to the Russian *necrorealists*, Armenian unofficial artists embody death in the figure of the zombie who is more alive than living beings themselves. Known as the 3rd Floor, these artists had initiated a cultural movement a year earlier that signaled the advent of contemporary art in Armenia within *perestroika*'s liberalization program. In Armenia, the 3rd Floor artistic movement congeals the anti-Soviet dimension of the *perestroika* avant-gardes, and ultimately of contemporary art: initially, the artists who were operating within the second sphere beneath official culture appeared as the avant-garde of Soviet cultural politics with *perestroika*, eventually forming the margins in the 1990s for the post-Soviet condition and paving the way for the institutionalization of contemporary art.

Formed by a loose group of artists, musicians, poets, and writers in their twenties, the movement embarked upon the reformation of the local Union of Artists in Armenia through exhibitions conceived as festivals of free creativity. Ideologically, the 3rd Floor movement presented a mixture of contradicting ideologies such as romantic liberalism, nationalism, and libertarianism with anarchist dreams of omnipotence. They appropriated Western signs and symbols that were often a mixture of high art and middle- to low-brow cultural icons. The members romanticized these symbols and artistic methods to the degree that they came to denote ideals of individual freedom and autonomy. In the practices of the 3rd Floor, these ideals were understood from an artistic perspective: the citizen's freedom was equal to that of the artist's "absolute and universal right to mix different artistic styles and images on the surface of the canvas" (Arvest 1992, 3–8) with the exhibition itself as a collage of incommensurable media and methods. Ultimately, what the movement strove to accomplish within a limited number of exhibitions was to bridge the gap between the first and second cultural spheres: to take from the first the public role of the artist in shaping social consciousness but ultimately reinstate the ideals of the first—the conception of the artist as an individual creator whose freedom in art has a transformative effect for unfree society. De-alienated art as a utopian sphere of exercising individual freedom was considered as more real than the dead reality of the disintegrating Soviet cultural institutions.

On December 12, 1988, several artists of the 3rd Floor movement, dressed as resurrected ghosts like their heavy metal heroes—the musicians from the groups Black Sabbath and Kiss—walked into one of the Union of Artists' conventional exhibitions and declared the death of official art (Harutyunyan 2017, 59–61). In this happening, recorded under two different titles—*The Official Art Has Died* and *Hail to the Union of Artists from the Netherworld*—they walked silently through the exhibition hall, viewed traditional paintings hung on the walls of an art institution defending Soviet official orthodoxy, and with the realization of the symbolic weight of their action (appearing retrospectively as symptomatic) took photographs of themselves in various groupings and positions and walked out (Figure 4.2).

If art was the collectively constructed dream of underground heroes, the institution was its counter-sphere: the conventional domain of a properly dead and officially sanctioned reality (the dead heroes of the netherworld were more alive than what belonged to the social world above the ground). Through the metaphor of the netherworld, the 3rd Floor artists strove to discover the de-alienated artistic subject who had managed to overcome the contaminating layers of ideology, including the ideology of creative production, and arrive at a belief that the social world could be transcended, in and through art, opening up a space for freedom. In the conditions when the identification with the social context could no longer be secured, nor could the artist's social function be affirmed, the imaginary world of total and absolute creation became a compensatory mechanism just as the artist was



FIGURE 4.2 3rd Floor, *Hail to the Union of Artists from the Netherworld: Official Art Has Died*, 1988. Documentation of the *happening*. Courtesy of Arman Grigoryan.

becoming increasingly marginalized in the emerging neoliberal conditions. Absolute statements, totalizing gestures, and strategies of self-annihilation so often characterizing late Soviet unofficial and post-Soviet neo-avantgarde practices are compensatory mechanisms through which artists construct their own reality as more real than social reality itself. In a way, the Soviet promise of de-alienation is achieved, but it is now a state wherein the artist is relegated to the margins of the social world, forcibly freed from work and totally “free” to make art. This zone of “freedom” is one constituted through the retreat of state imperatives but also through the evacuation of the artists’ social relevance altogether. It is a void left behind by the withdrawal of the publics (Boniface no longer enjoys the pleasure of the public that his work engenders). And it is this zone that “contemporary” art comes to occupy. The disappearing world of the Soviet historical experience supplied a negative content for the conception of art as a free space for dreaming that was to persist throughout the post-Soviet 1990s. The historical repression, or repressed historicity, of the Soviet may be made visible by revisiting the formative moment of contemporary art from within the Soviet cultural world. But this historicity may also appear through the consideration of artistic practices that confront the ideologically induced permanent now as the temporality of global contemporary art.

In the Cracks of the Material World

The repressed historicity of the Soviet experience appears in artist Mher Azatyan’s photographs of the disintegrating material world of Soviet Armenia in the post-Soviet conditions of the 2000s (the series dates 2000–2014). This world is a post-heroic afterimage of the one that has passed. It can be pieced together only through visual fragments that are allegorical in nature. Captions juxtaposed with the photographs cite everyday truisms or simple poetic truths composed by the artist or recorded from vernacular culture. Meanwhile captions or “free texts” as the artist calls them, are not attached to photographs but can be juxtaposed in any combination upon display. These “visual accidents” include a photographic triptych of a fan hanging from a ceiling and framed by old-fashioned wallpaper,



FIGURE 4.3 Mher Azatyan, *Untitled Photograph # 29* and “Free Text,” 2000–2014 (22.5 × 45 centimeters). Courtesy of Mher Azatyan.

which resonates with a similarly ornamented curtain (Figure 4.3). The triptych shows the same object thrice—from a distant to a close-up view. Another triptych is an awkward attempt to capture the moon (or the reflection of the interior yellow electric light) through an old window frame interrupted by the middle photograph of painted flowers on the wall. Other photographs show a dilapidated carousel in a park still occupied by a mother and a child; old bed frames abandoned among construction rubble; kitschy public sculptures in former sites of popular entertainment; household items for sale on the ground; an easel with empty shelves; a fragment of a landscape with snow-covered trees. There are several dozen of these photographs produced throughout a decade and a half. There are also several dozen texts that range from the poetic to the banal: “I know what the right thing is to do, but I do the opposite”; “Money doesn’t like equality”; “The artist lives somewhere far, far away”; “Come, come, come even if it takes a year even if it takes hundred years just come, just come”; “Our childhood is reality”; “Losing a person is a difficult thing, You will go to America, I will go to...” The open combination of text and image reveals a certain economy of material scarcity and idiomatic parsimony as formative of the post-Soviet artist’s world (Azatyan, Karoyan, and Arevshatyan 2011). The juxtaposition of the iconic and the laconic (the photograph and the text) opens a space of intense dreaming from within the very material folds of the disintegrating world. Mher Azatyan takes his flight from this world, yet his disappearance is not a form of transcendence of the everyday (unlike dissident Soviet artists’ works such as in Ilya Kabakov’s 1984 installation *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*) but a temporary and strategic concealment of the subject within material cracks opened up by the disintegration of this world.

Contemporary art as a mode of post-Soviet artistic production is grounded upon a DIY social technique of survival. Astghik Melkonyan’s 2011 *Manual of How to Manage a Monthly Salary* exposes the sharpened contradictions at play between the world of everyday survival and that of art, work, and creativity. The manual is an aid, a planning device, and a documentation of everyday techniques of survival all in one. It constitutes a set of pragmatic decisions about the conditions of the reproduction of the artist’s labor power within free-market capitalism. The manual is composed of graphs printed on large sheets of plexiglass (1.5 × 20 meters) “that were installed” on a scaffolding in the Palazzo Ca’Zenobio in Venice during the Venice Biennale of 2011. The graphs map the formal economy of wage-labor with other means of everyday survival—such as freelancing or relying on communal gift and exchange but also on an “economy of hope” through a coffee-cup fortune reading. As the reader-viewer follows the installation, they discover a post-Soviet artist’s world of

material survival meticulously recorded and mapped in terms of money and time. All that makes up everyday survival is registered here, accounted for, except the time for producing art, including this particular artwork. It is because, while the reproduction of the artist's labor power is a precondition for making the artwork, art in the post-Soviet condition is not subject to the time- and resource-management economy of everyday life. The precarity of artistic labor does not even figure in the artist's means of survival since the free-market economy failed to construct a similarly "free" market for contemporary art.¹⁷

The post-Soviet condition has exacerbated the contradictions of the Soviet dual cultural spheres: if the official sphere had supposedly overcome the distinction between production and creation while the non-official sphere emphasized the gap between the two (by reintroducing the bourgeois conception of art as a de-alienated sphere of freedom), the post-Soviet condition created an economy of precarity without wages, and an art without a public presence, leaving the artists themselves on the margins of a dreamworld turned into a nightmare. The globalization of contemporary art taking place in and preconditioned by the subsumption of the former Soviet sphere under the dictates of market economy comes to reinstate the failure of de-alienation of art and labor alike opened up within the sphere of cultural production in the Soviet Union. From one point of view, global contemporary art is always already and everywhere a post-Soviet condition.

Notes

- 1 For the artistic discourses and institutions in the Arab world and post-Civil War Lebanon, please refer to the 2007 special section "Curating Beirut," in *Art Journal*, dedicated to post-war Lebanese art with articles by Sarah Rogers, Walid Sadek, Hannah Feldman, Laura Marks, and others. See *Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (2007), pp. 1–127. See also: Auji (2020); Elias (2018); Saadawi (2017); Sadek (2015); Scheid (2008); Toukan (2010).
- 2 This includes Art Dubai and the Jameel Art Foundation in Dubai, The Sharjah Art Biennial and the Sharjah Art Foundation in Sharjah, the Louvre in Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, and other smaller scale institutions.
- 3 The project, called Dilijan Arts Observatory, was curated by Clémentine Deliss in response to an invitation by Ruben Vardanyan and his wife Veronika Zonabed. Initially conceived as a pilot project to set up an experimental art and research school, the project, however, failed to convince the funders of the necessity of the school. During the closing of the project that culminated in a festival, disagreements and discords between the curator and the participants, on the one hand, and the reception of the festival by local inhabitants, on the other, were not a convincing beginning for a long-term investment. Ultimately, the result of the workshops, lectures, and expeditions, which lasted several months, were displayed in Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin as part of the exhibition *Hallo World: Revising a Collection* in 2018. My aim here is not so much to critique the curatorial work of Deliss but to locate in the project a symptom of the structural operations of global contemporary art.
- 4 This was conveyed by several people I spoke to during the festival.
- 5 Art historian and curator Octavian Esanu (2012) discusses the shift from the socialist mode of artistic production to the post-Socialist one.
- 6 It is noteworthy that, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, both former Soviet and post-Socialist Eastern European anti-Soviet art entered into "global," i.e. Euro-American, circulation, through a production of self-exoticization and self-othering as a dark desert of "impossible history." For further reading, see Djurić (2003); IRWIN(2003); Grzinić, Heeg, and Darian (2006). For a critique of this self-othering, see Bago (2020).

- 7 Some of the authors who claim that 1989 is a clear break towards establishing contemporary art as a new period of artistic production include Esanu (2012); Lee (2012); Osborne (2009); Smith (2009).
- 8 There are only a few authors who trace a continuity between Soviet cultural politics and contemporary art of the post-Soviet period. Art historian Raino Isto (2021) claims that Socialist Realism offered a model of art's globalization within the socialist camp in ways that can even be considered a precursor to the situation of today's global contemporary art.
- 9 The many case studies of historically concrete situations of the emergence of contemporary art as asynchronous across the world are convincingly demonstrated by the contributions in the edited volume by Esanu (2021); the contexts studied include but are not limited to Slovenia, Lebanon, Armenia, Egypt, and India.
- 10 Here, I am referring to the artists who are paid wages to be artists rather than conducting other types of art-related technical jobs such as art handlers, instructors, and so on.
- 11 This was an imperative lying at the very foundation of Socialist Realism as it was instituted by Stalin and Andrei Zhdanov throughout the Soviet 1930s.
- 12 A constitutive dynamic that Thomas Crow (1998) attributes to modernism since the second half of the nineteenth in the context of the Second Empire in France.
- 13 Stalin's so-called Great Break (or "second revolution") took place in 1928 with the cancellation of the New Economic Policy that had been enacted by Lenin in 1921 and that had introduced elements of bourgeois economics within state socialism. Instead, Stalin launched a centralized and teleologically planned economy organized around five-year plans that would last to the very last days of the USSR. Stalin's "second revolution" is a period where the Politburo still didn't exercise direct control over culture and scholarship. The imperative to construct the economic base to combat underdevelopment was paralleled by the *proletkult*'s fervor to construct a proletarian cultural sphere with the same tempo. The year 1934 marked a turn away from the Soviet state's relatively relaxed attitude towards the cultural sphere (they even encouraged *proletkult* fervor). The institution of Socialist Realism as a cultural policy brought about the centralization of the sphere cultural, encouragement of the return to cultural traditions, and the complete eradication of *proletkult* groups.
- 14 This resonates uncannily with Margaret Thatcher's 1981 statement on neoliberalism—"Economics are the method: the object is to change the heart and soul," Interview for *Sunday Times* (3 May 1981). Available at: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104475>, accessed July 21, 2022.
- 15 Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twenty-Second Party Congress on February 25, 1956 denounced Stalin's crimes and opened a path for a relative liberalization of culture in the 1960s, known in the USSR as the period of the Thaw.
- 16 Ironically, it was the Russian president Vladimir Putin's ominous speech on the eve of the invasion of Russian troops in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 that drew a clear political distinction between Lenin and Stalin. He painted Lenin as a destroyer of the great Russian empire who gave the right of national self-determination to its former provinces (such as Ukraine), something that Stalin tried to undo but failed. The identification of Lenin and Stalin, and consequently of Stalin with the Soviet experience as such, is itself a product of Stalinism not only in the post-Socialist East but also in Western Europe and North America.
- 17 Despite the effort to introduce a market for contemporary art in the 1990s, in the early 2000s there were barely any local galleries representing contemporary artists. To my knowledge, no art gallery in Armenia, up until now, has participated in any of the large art fairs (Dubai, Basel, Miami, Paris, etc.).

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2000–2010

Art and Politics: Artist Statement

Tania Bruguera

As an artist I have been researching ways in which Art can be applied to everyday political life, not only as its dispositive for self-reflection but also as a way to generate and install models for social interactions that could provide new ways to engage with utopia. The concept of the ephemeral is one that presents itself in the form of the political and its effectiveness. The political is elaborated in my work at specific locations, behaviors, and negotiation processes all with a consciousness of its temporality and range of actions. I consider my work to be contextual art, one that subordinates any preconceived notion of aesthetic or artistic strategies to the needs of the “here and now,” of the currency, weight, and impact of the events in relationship with specific moments of history and audiences. The ephemeral is also located in the problematic of authorship, which tends to be distributed and disseminated among the participant-performers in my work.

In my work I present various modalities of delegation of authorship. Not only is the responsibility of the work negotiated with the audience in terms of its documentation or its completion, but the audience is at times requested to create the work itself. My intervention at the 10th Havana Biennial (2009) exemplifies the ways in which the audience takes control: a stage, a podium, live microphones, two persons dressed in military uniforms, a white dove, and the possibility to access the podium to have one minute without censorship transformed itself into a viral space for freedom of speech.¹ What is delegated is the privilege acquired by the artist, the privilege an artist is awarded by society and by the history of the role of art and artists, which is one of more easily negotiated and expected freedom and tolerance.

The goal of the work is not only to provoke ways of thinking, to spark reflection, or to create a public forum to debate ideas that have been shown in their state of contradictions but to realize the possibility of working with *arte útil* (useful art). Art is mostly accepted in its contemplative function; even when the work itself is presented in an “active” way, what is demanded at the end from the audience is mostly an activation of the mind. What is pursued with useful art is not restricted to events where the resulting reaction from the encounter with the work generates action on the part of the audience. The goal is rather to create an application for the double condition of the metaphor—literally, a “change of

name,” or a reframing of a situation, whether it is in an art museum or on the street or in an educational institution. This is a strategy that works both in its practical implementation and in the symbolic realm. For example, my creation (in 1998 in Havana) of a long-term project in the form of a school for political art (the *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* [“Behavior Art School”]) dealt with the implications of the distribution of knowledge, simultaneously, as a concrete way to access reality and in its symbolic dimension. While recent traditions of artistic interventions in everyday practical life tend to strip them of their functionality (whether social or mechanical) so they can be relocated in the affect and the aesthetic perception of the viewer, there are other older models (closer to my interest) where the reason for the creation of art has more immediately practical implementations.

The relationship between ethics and desire presents itself in the work as a crossroad for these matters. While I believe in art as one of the possible ways by which to put in motion a social engine, I strongly advocate for its self-sabotage. When I say self-sabotage, it is not merely to refer to the creation of a paradox, which is a process that is always assumed in artwork but to refer to a process of self-delimitation of the “aura” of the project and the artist.

I work with *Arte de Conducta* (behavior or conduct art). I do not work on creating iconic revelations of the body but on socially engaged constructions of the collective. The use of *Arte de Conducta* assumes the location of the artistic in the social behavior as an artistic language and in its capability as generator of meanings. I’m interested in creating an environment that allows transforming “the audience member” into “a citizen.” In the work, *Tatlin’s Whisper #5* (performed in 2008 at the Tate Modern Gallery in London; see Figure 5.1), the audience is forced to recede to a political imaginary created by the media, one with which they have an anesthetized relationship. The images, not previously linked with a personal experience, are staged in order to transfer what was solely the knowledge of another political time and place into a personal memory. In this case, two mounted police entered the museum with the instruction to use their training on crowd control with the show’s audience.



FIGURE 5.1 Tania Bruguera and Anri Sala (2005) *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (Behavior Art School), Havana, Cuba. July 15, 2017, 923 × 692 [SYMPOSIUM] BOOK CLUB. Courtesy of Tania Bruguera & Anri Sala.

Another aspect in my research is the presentation of models of negotiation for the visibility of the work as art. I'm interested in exploring the ways in which things become artistic, in what makes a moment art. I privilege the moment of doubt about the condition of the artistic by delaying the audience's moment of awareness. The denominative function (naming something as "art") is transfigured into a participative one (finding oneself inside a work of art). My work is therefore divided between long- and short-term projects, ranging from a single day to several years. What determines the duration is the practical use of time to accomplish a specific goal, and the time lag between the presence of the work as an event and its delimitation or recognition as an artwork, its visibility as such, its potential to generate controlled meaning. The works are not always immediately revealed negotiations between the real and the represented but precisely the staging of such tension. These decisions are taken in relationship with the way in which the work embarks upon the social realm and its expectations with the state of the political.

My work deals with the concept of political representation and its relationship with direct access to established structures of power. I'm interested in appropriating the resources of power to create power, to create political situations through art.

NOTE: This artist's statement was originally published on Tania Bruguera's website, where it is dated 2009/1992, at: <https://arendtinstitute.org/?p=5716>, accessed May 18, 2022

Note

- 1 On this famous piece, see Bishop (2009).

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Māori and Pacific Art at the Turn of a New Millennium

Nina Tonga and Caroline Vercoe

Aotearoa New Zealand emerged as an important site for contemporary art practices developing from the 1990s and into the 2000s.¹ Māori and Pacific artists, many of the latter being children of parents who had migrated in the postwar 1940s period, have become leading figures in Indigenous and decolonial movements. Their works were characterized by a blending of customary concepts, symbols, and motifs with contemporary Western art practices, as well as an interrogation of colonial histories specific to the Pacific, and their legacies. In line with their counterparts overseas, they often explored complex and entangled cultural identities and experiences. Specific to Māori and Pacific artists' experiences, however, are the aligning of their practices with Indigenous genealogical connections that tangibly link them in the present to ancient ancestral lineages. These lineages are, in turn, located within particular places in the *whenua* (land), and even further back, beyond the reach of colonial imperialism, to ancient creator deities whose domains lie within the land, sea, and sky. It is these relationships that make the contemporary art practices of Māori and Pacific artists in Aotearoa so compelling and significant.

The decade 2000–2010 saw the establishment and global success of key artists emerging from the late 1980s and 1990s, including Lisa Reihana and Michael Parekōwhai. This decade also witnessed the emergence of a new generation of artists, who drew on this established platform and harnessed the potential of Internet and digital technologies. It is also important to note that throughout the preceding decades, an infrastructure of support was also set up that saw Māori and Pacific art historians, anthropologists, curators, and writers taking up key positions in universities and institutions across the country. They brought with them a similar heritage and cultural experience, and they were able to locate Māori and Pacific artists' works and practices within the context that they emerged from, as opposed to positioning them within Euro-American traditions. While, stylistically, visual connections are apparent, feminist and even postcolonial discourses and approaches did not tend to inform these artists' works as much as the influence of their Indigenous ancestral connections, and important concepts and practices that are intrinsic to customary Māori and Pacific art forms.

Following on from the 1980s and 1990s, decades that witnessed the emergence of postcolonial theory and the culture wars, the 2000s saw artists, curators, and writers in the Pacific

foregrounding decolonial and Indigenous concerns. These concerns, however, while informed by this polemical decade, were more influenced by the previous decade. In the Pacific, the 1970s marked a time when Pacific nations were increasingly gaining sovereignty from colonial oversight and forging new pathways for self-determination. In terms of the visual arts, a surge of activism was led in large part by women. Their practices tended to reject the modernist trajectories that many of their male counterparts had drawn on and reflected more explicitly political and social commentary concerns. They highlighted relationships between Indigenous Māori and Pacific matriarchal lineages and ancestral deities, representation in relation to colonial legacies, and the crucial connections between them and contemporary issues of Indigenous sovereignty, communities, land ownership, and self-determination. This chapter highlights contemporary Māori and Pacific artists in Aotearoa New Zealand whose works exemplify these issues, and also marks a turn toward photographic, performative, and moving image forms influenced by the then burgeoning digital age.

There is a Māori *whakatauki* (proverb), *Ka Mua, Ka Muri*, which has been translated as looking back in order to move forward. Often, when explaining its meaning, the image of someone walking backward into the future is described, and the understanding is that, while the future is still unknown, looking to the past can offer insights and historical patterns that can determine our behavior and decisions in the present, which will, in turn, influence events in the future. Indigenous and decolonial thinking are crucial to teasing out the dialectical tensions involved in such an endeavor. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's groundbreaking book *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*, first published in 1999, offered a range of entry points for researchers and artists alike to develop practices that strategically employed Indigenous and decolonial frameworks and epistemologies (Smith 2021). Her work situates present-day hegemonic structures within the legacies of colonialism and globalization, highlighting how they continue to create ongoing and pervasive epistemological violence to Indigenous languages, art forms, and customary practices. The 2000s also saw the rise of digital and Internet technologies and the increasing support infrastructure provided in Aotearoa New Zealand in particular that targeted and funded Māori and Pacific curatorial and artist initiatives, creating the platform for now established festivals, curatorial positions, community-based art spaces, and funding pathways for artists to access.

Māori artists in Aotearoa New Zealand have a long and enduring legacy of gallery-based art practice, stretching back to the 1950s. They continue to exert a strong presence and influence on the development of contemporary New Zealand art. Biculturalism as a nation-building point of departure in the country, though deeply flawed in its implementation, foregrounds partnership and collaboration as core values—seen in the development of both Māori and Pākehā art. Pākehā is a Māori term that dates back to the mid-1800s and referred to British settlers; today it refers to New Zealand Europeans. In saying this, it was not until 1987 that both Māori and English became recognized as national languages. These bicultural dynamics revolve around a partnership between Māori and the Crown (government). Te Tiriti O Waitangi The Treaty of Waitangi, the nation's founding documents signed in 1840, guaranteed Māori rights of citizenship. However, full rights to citizenship were subverted and it was not until 1975, over a century later, with the passing of the Treaty of Waitangi Act and the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal, that Māori had an infrastructure in place to address Treaty-related grievances and to file claims for redress. Māori art historian Jonathan Mane-Wheoki was alert to the politicization of Māori communities and art practices in the 1970s, in large part due to the Treaty of Waitangi Act: "The politicisation of Māori has," he contended, "among other things, sharpened their appreciation of the propaganda value of art" (Mane-Wheoki 1995).

Unique in its demographic makeup, bicultural Aotearoa New Zealand has an increasing Indigenous Māori population, many identifying with their *imi* (tribal areas) and comprising just over 16% of the population, the second largest after New Zealand European (Pākehā)

at approximately 70%, and Asian at around 15%. The diverse and established Pacific communities make up just over 8% of the overall population demographic.³ It is important to understand, however, the complexities behind these numbers. For example, within this makeup, significantly more Niueans reside in Aotearoa than in their island homeland of Niue, more Cook Islanders live in Aotearoa than in the Cook Islands, and the largest Pacific demographic of Sāmoans almost outnumber those in Sāmoa. This makes for a rich and dynamic community of artists whose works and practices reflect their urban Pacific experiences as well as crucial links to their heritage homelands.

The turn of the millennium also signaled the end of the fiber-optic boom—a period of intense infrastructure building—which facilitated increased connectivity across the Pacific region. In Aotearoa New Zealand, there was excitement about the possibilities of increased global connectivity and communications. For many, the Internet was optimistically promoted as a solution to the ongoing struggle of Aotearoa's geographical isolation in the South Pacific (Holloway-Smith 2020). Connectivity in Aotearoa relied on a single submarine cable system: the Southern Cross Cable Network (SX), which carried 98% of the country's Internet traffic. The Southern Cross Cable network lies 7 km below the surface of the Pacific Ocean and connected Aotearoa, Hawai'i, and the US mainland, returning back through Hawai'i, Fiji, and Sydney.⁴ A second fiber-optic cable was later added in 2017; however, both were located in the same zones as telegraph cables from the early twentieth century (Staosielski 2015, 15–16).

Growing connectivity provided by submarine cables and the availability of international bandwidth in the wider Pacific aided growth through digitization and established virtual links to the rest of the world. However, notions of connectivity across the Pacific Ocean long pre-dated the arrival of Internet technologies. In Tahiti, for instance, the installation of the Honotua fiber-optic cable that connected the island nation with Hawai'i and provided Internet access also reinvigorated ancient ancestral connections between the seafaring island nations. Their shared genealogies are memorialized with a monument marking the landing site in Tahiti which had the following trilingual inscription:

In memory of the people of Papenoo and of Hawai'i, who established ties in the past:
 Tapuhe'euanu'u from Tapahi, who fishing from his canoe, caught Hawai'i the Great,
 Te'ura-vahine from Ha'apaiano'o, the goddess Pere, who sought refuge in the volcano of
 Hawai'i the Great,
 Mo'iteha, King of Hawai'i, who came back to Tahiti to build his marae Ra'iteha at
 Mou'a'uranuiatea,
 Ra'amaitahiti, his son, King of Tapahi, who brought his drum to Kaua'i,
 To revive these ancient connections, Honotua was made: The Submarine cable that links
 Tahiti to Hawai'i.
 After quietly undulating in the deep sea, it has landed here, at Mamu (silence).
 Hopefully human ignorance will dissolve into silence and only knowledge will be
 conveyed.⁵

The plaque transforms the landing point of an active undersea cable into a site of Indigenous cultural education, transmission, and connection. As well as connecting Tahiti to a global network, the plaque also framed these technologies within an indigenous paradigm drawing parallels between the relational nature of light waves of communication and the waves of the Ocean.⁶

It was also in the 2000s that a number of international exhibitions featuring contemporary Pacific art took place, raising its profile globally, notably *Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific* (Asia Society Museum, New York, 2004), *Pasifika Styles* (Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, 2006–2008), *Le Folauga* (Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan, 2007), and *Date Line: Contemporary Art from the Pacific* (Neuer

Berliner Kunstverein [NBK], Berlin, 2007–2008). The *Asia Pacific Triennale* (APT) at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia remains the premier large exhibition event for the region; however, it has tended to look to Asia as its stakeholder relation, a relationship that emerged in the 1990s as part of the Australian government's turn toward Asia as a trading and economic partner. In her introductory essay in the inaugural APT1 catalogue (1993), curator Caroline Turner underlined this vision as “inevitable” in her rationale for the Triennial in regional terms:

Yet this part of the world is establishing contexts for intraregional cooperation and, given its growing political, strategic and economic significance, it is inevitable that its contemporary cultures and art, which in turn mirror the dynamic changes now so characteristic of the region, should receive greater global attention (Turner 1993).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the age of the Internet and global connectivity offered cultural opportunities for Māori to recover, preserve, and promote Māori culture. Māori artists in this decade pioneered approaches to indigenize new media and technologies by drawing on the richness of Te Reo Māori (indigenous language of Aotearoa) and Māori cultural concepts. Their uptake of new media and digital technologies afforded by the Internet continued a long history of indigenous appropriation of new technologies to enhance and support extant forms of cultural expression. The consecutive waves of contemporary Māori artists who adopted media and digital technologies in this decade continued a long history of indigenous appropriation of “offshore” technologies. Jonathan Mane-Wheoki frames the adoption of these new technologies as a continuum of adaptation and innovation by Māori artists as he writes:

they are ... the living descendants of their ancient ancestors. In exploring new media as they arise, the present generation of Māori artists, driven by curiosity, is doing what their tohunga whakairo forebears did when metal tools were first introduced to this country—acculturating and indigenizing the new technology for creative and expressive purposes (Mane-Wheoki 1999).

Far from assimilating into Western or global culture, many Māori artists employed and adopted new technologies as creative expressions of indigeneity.

The creative potential of Internet technologies in the first decade of the millennium was celebrated in two key exhibitions of Māori art: *Hiko! New Energies in Māori Art*, 1999, at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery Annex, curated by Felicity Milburn with Johnathan Mane-Wheoki and Deidre Brown, and *Techno Māori: Māori Art in the Digital Age*, 2001, curated by Brown and Mane-Wheoki staged simultaneously at City Gallery and Pātaka Art + Museum in Porirua, near Wellington. Both exhibitions featured works by emerging and established Māori artists operating in what Mane-Wheoki describes as “Te Ao Hiko” (the age of electricity/electronics) where *rorohiko* (computers) and global communications are commonplace.⁷ Among them was a generation of institutionally trained Māori artists such as Rachael Rakena and Simon Kaan, both graduates of Otago Polytechnic, where computer use and computer graphics were introduced into the fine arts curriculum in the 1980s (Tomlin 2016).

Both exhibitions located the Internet and new technologies within a cultural paradigm as a creative medium and mode of communication.⁸ *Techno Māori* went further in that it also recontextualized virtual space (accessible through computers) as available for Māori art and artists through the creation of a CD-ROM, which functioned as a shared virtual exhibition space. This computer-mediated element of *Techno Māori* was innovative for its time because it located the experience of computing within a Māori paradigm. The CD-ROM featured animated films and poems, video, essays, and artists' statements from the nineteen artists in

the exhibition. Included on the CD-ROM was the 2000 animated film *Tē Ika a Māui* by Māori animator, producer, and graphic designer Rongotai Lomas. In this film Lomas retells the Māori foundation legend of Māui, who, using the jawbone of his ancestor, fished up the Great Fish, which formed the North Island of New Zealand. Lomas's work demonstrated a new medium through which narratives and *mātauranga* associated with Māui could be retold, transmitted, and stored. Conceptually, the choice of subject matter also modeled the possibility of creation narratives to serve as the foundation for incorporating digital technologies into a Māori paradigm.⁹

Similarly, Rachael Rakena of Ngāi Tahu and Ngā Puhi iwi (tribes) claimed online spaces as a "new realm of the cosmos," bringing it into an explicit connection with creation narratives. Throughout this decade, Rakena worked frequently in collaboration with other artists to create richly layered installations, videos, and photographs. Her early exploration of cyberspace led her to coin the term "Toi Rerehiko," a play on the Te Reo Māori word for computer—*rorohiko*—literally translated as "electric brain." She replaces the beginning of the word *rorohiko* using the word *rere*, which implies a transitional state such as an escape, flight, or flow (Randerson 2008). For Rakena, the new term names and centers digital space within a Māori paradigm, likening its expansive nature to the ocean as she writes:

Digital space is a new realm of the cosmos ... like the ocean our tupuna crossed. It is specifically non-land based. It is a fluid medium through which movement, both travel and floating occurs. This space allows for relationships across terrains where the issue of identity lies not so much in geography but in the development of communities in fluid spaces that are both resonant with mythologies, whakapapa [genealogy] and belonging, and responsive to contemporary technologies. And, indeed, produced by them (Rakena 2003).

Water is a recurring metaphor in Rakena's practice that in this decade functioned as a metaphor for cyberspace and the fluidity of Māori identity. At the time, her association of cyberspace as body of water resonated with the popular water-related language of being online such as "surfing," "streaming," and "navigating." New modes of communication online like emails, bulletin boards, and chat groups afforded new understandings of community and community identity. Inspired by her own iwi website, Rakena created a series of installations that explored the possibilities of constructing shared Māori identity and sense of belonging through email correspondence. Installations such as ... *as an individual and not under the name of Ngāi Tahu* (2001) and *Rerehiko* (2003) utilize emails exchanged between members of the Kāi Tahu Whanau, a tribal-based group that began as a university student collective at Otago Polytechnic.¹⁰

In both works, Rakena captures members of the Kāi Tahu Whanau group submerged underwater and overlaid with floating streams of text taken from email conversations among members of the Kāi Tahu Whanau. For Rakena, the streams of email are a new form of virtual tukutuku (lattice-work wall panels) of a digital wharenui (meeting house) as she writes:

The digital text of the email and its aesthetic of pixelated patterns create the new tukutuku for the wharenui (ātea) in cyberspace in which a community often meets. This evocative blend makes visible the living culture of the contemporary iwi on email as emotions, life, death, business, language, ideas, culture, gossip, humor, panui [announcements], and information kōrero [dialogue].¹¹ (Rakena 2003, 3–4).

The installation ... *as an individual and not under the name of Ngāi Tahu* utilized a thread of email exchanges related to an issue within the group concerning access and sharing of Indigenous knowledge. Similarly in *Rerehiko*, Rakena uses a thread of emails sent in

a twenty-four-hour period where the members of the group were debating a potential performance at an annual iwi meeting. Within the group, the practice of electronically cc'ing all members was well established, transforming email into a discursive space for asserting individual perspectives and resolving issues within a collective *kōrero*. For Rakena, emails as exchanged among members become visual modes of *kōrero* and function overall as “signifiers of things Māori in Cyberspace” (Rakena 2003, 3–4).

Within the first five years of the new millennium the techno-cultural landscape changed dramatically with the introduction of mobile phone technologies—particularly the smartphone—and social media. Smartphones and other mobile devices with Internet access ushered in a new sense of immediacy, allowing people to be online anytime and anywhere.

The ubiquity of the Internet coupled with the platform characteristics of social media saw an explosion of new “user-created” mediums such as “selfies,” blogs, and their video equivalent vlogs (video logs). New forms of popular culture emerged through the networked distribution of this content, shaping new aesthetics and thematic explorations in contemporary art and curatorial practice. For example, community documentarian, contemporary artist, and curator Janet Lilo of Ngā Puhi iwi, Niuean and Sāmoan descent, a self-described social commentator, developed a practice online and in the offline context of the gallery that captures the zeitgeist of the digital era. Lilo was an active participant on several social networking websites and on the video-sharing platform YouTube. In 2006, Lilo began exploring the global phenomena of amateur performance videos of people singing covers of popular music chart hits of the time such as *Like You'll Never See Me Again* (2007) by American singer Alicia Keys and *So Sick* (2006) by Noyo. Naming her videos after the titles of the songs, she downloads other people's videos and carefully edits them together using split screens, multiple sound channels, and jump cuts to create a single collective performance. For Lilo, these remix videos are a form of collaboration as reflected in the closing credits of her videos, which lists the user names of all the performers and states her intention:

the purpose of this edit was to collaborate youtube singers with other youtube singers as a random mix. I take no credit for the talent of any of the singers featured and in fact, I am a fan of anyone who has the courage to put themselves out there. Well done guys.¹²

Lilo's compiled videos speak to the popularity of YouTube as a platform for performance; they also visualize the highly codified and networked nature of YouTube videos. All the videos are first-person with the performer looking directly at the camera and most are situated in the private domestic spaces of bedrooms, bathrooms, and living rooms. These recurring visual elements capture how YouTube and the pervasive nature of the Internet at this time were reshaping notions of public and private.

Lilo's seminal installation *Top 16, 2007–2018*, mined the materials of online life further through an ongoing exploration of social networking websites. Within the first decade of the new millennium, social networking websites surged, building geographically specific audiences. In New Zealand, for example, the social networking website Bebo was hugely popular. It became the leading social networking website in 2007 and was visited more than any other website. Bebo was also incredibly popular among Māori and Pacific communities, which local Sāmoan producer Lisa Taouma described as the growing “brown Bebo nation” (Taouma 2007). Among this growing audience, new creative practices emerged among these communities such as the creation of “skins” graphic user backgrounds that could be easily shared. At the height of *Bebo's* popularity, sharing graphic skins became a critical vehicle for Pacific peoples in New Zealand to express diaspora identities and their globally dispersed genealogical and cultural networks.

Lilo's installation and the title of the work was inspired by her observation of the popularity of *Bebo* among Māori and Pacific youth in Auckland.¹³ The core of the installation

features content taken directly from social networking website profiles, printed out and presented as physical objects. Initially starting with Bebo, over time the installation has included appropriated profile photographs, graphic drawings, and remix videos taken from several social networking websites, as well as sculpture, cardboard screens, and picnic tables. Despite the changing content, each installation followed a similar spatial layout inspired by the format of a profile page. Her representation of social networking content offline encouraged visitors to emulate online activities such as browsing through seemingly endless albums of profile photographs looking for people they might know, watching YouTube remix videos, and posting comments, albeit on picnic tables rather than in a virtual “chat” or “comments” field. These activities and the collaborative features of her work highlighted the collectively authored and networked nature of identity on social networking websites.

The networked sensibility of the decade 2000–2010 is also evident in the photographic and moving image works that visualized the growing diaspora networks of Māori and Pacific communities in New Zealand. In 2001, changes to the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement by the Australian government, which removed previous benefits that had existed for New Zealanders living in Australia, shed light on these rapidly growing populations. In particular, the contemporary flows of Māori and Pacific migrants to Australia were the subject of the moving image work, *Pacific Washup*, 2003–2004, by Rachael Rakena in collaboration with Australian-based, New Zealand-born Sāmoan artists Fes Fa’anana and Brian Fuata. *Pacific Washup* captures a surreal arrival of Fa’anana, Fuata, and fellow Māori and Pacific artists Latai and Seini Taumoepeau, Roslyn and Atawhai Whareaitu, and Bernadette Awatere. In this powerful image, the artists appeared to have washed up on the shore of popular Bondi Beach in Sydney clothed in plaid plastic laundry bags and were greeted to puzzled looks from local beach patrons. For Rakena, the art work spoke directly to the experiences of migrants and to the drivers of contemporary migration to Australia; she comments:

Back then there were about 26,000 Māori and 43,000 Pacific people living in Sydney. We incorporated themes of cultural alienation, dislocation, and displacement experienced by immigrants into the work as well as a vision of a brighter future and survival of their cultures and communities.¹⁴

Laundry bags were chosen because of their ubiquity and their use by different communities to transport food, goods, and bedding. Within the context of the artwork, the plastic bags, and the people transported inside them, become a powerful symbol of migration and the growing mobility of Māori and Pacific people.

Another reference relating to the laundry bags in *Pacific Washup* was connected to their description in Australia as “refugee bags” in reference to their use by increasing numbers of asylum-seeking boat arrivals. Concurrent with the making of the work were the rising political tensions that arose in the wake of the *Tampa Affair* of 2001, where 438 asylum seekers were refused permission to enter Australian waters. Following this incident, and despite international criticism, a series of border protection laws known as the “Pacific Solution” were implemented that denied asylum seekers automatic right to apply for refugee status (Blair 2021). These laws also enabled the Australian government to process asylum seekers in offshore immigration detention centers in Nauru and Manus Island. References to these immigration issues in *Pacific Washup* were heightened in the collaborative installation *U.F.O.B.*, made in collaboration with sculptor Brett Graham of Ngāti Koroki Kahukura and Tainui iwi for the 2006 Sydney Biennale. The installation comprised of a fleet of hovering “unidentified flying objects” with portholes that opened up to underwater imagery and the arrivals of Rakena’s *Pacific Washup*. Borrowing from the language of science fiction, *U.F.O.B.* draws connections between aliens (UFOs or unidentified flying objects) and the derogatory term for recent Pacific migrants (FOBS or fresh off the boat) as projections of the other (Brunt 2006).

The 2000s also emerged in the region as a decade characterized by artists creating rich, performative photographic narratives that celebrated ancient deities and creation stories as well as interrogating and indigenizing colonial histories and tropes of the Pacific as an exotic paradise. Two of the most enduring gendered tropes of European colonial violence center on the so-called Dusky Maiden and Noble Savage. In this case, embodying colonial exotic ideals of Pacific femininity and masculinity, these types have dominated the ways that Pacific people have been framed in literature, art, and tourism now for centuries. While gender issues and representation have formed a key aspect of many artists' practices, feminism has not been a pervasive reference. An Indigenous Pacific feminist lens, however, offers the possibility of broadening the framework of feminism by drawing on ancient ancestral lineages that stretch into the present and honoring the agency within matriarchal and gender relationships. Understanding gender roles as reciprocal and relational, embodying systems of collective power and authority, as opposed to seeing them in relation to access to economic status or opportunity, which have tended to define Western feminist approaches, are key aspects of Indigenous Pacific epistemologies (Vercoe 2022, 82).

Lisa Reihana (Ngā Puhī, Ngāti Hine), one of very few Māori contemporary women artists to emerge in the 1980s, developed an innovative moving image and photographic practice throughout the 2000s. Drawing on Māori concepts, lineages, and art forms, she positioned them in digital and photographic realms also connected to strategies found in international contemporary art. Reihana looked to her family and local community of friends, whom she would often feature in her works, creating distinctively urban Māori images and short videos that retold and restaged ancient Indigenous stories. She also transformed important Māori art forms such as the *wharenui* (carved meeting house) and *pou pou* (ancestral carvings) and *tukutuku* (woven) panels within it. Reihana's *Digital Marae* (2001) brought these deities to life in glossy photographic images, casting them with friends and family. She conceived of these works not as portraits but as ancestral photographic "carvings." Characteristically, the works feature modernist design and fashion elements. *Mahuika*, goddess of fire, for instance, sits resplendent in a fiery, volcanic black and red Issey Miyake gown on a Marcel Breuer chair. The elderly matriarch, who stares defiantly at the camera, is the artist's father's eldest sister. The moment that is captured relates to her conversations with the god Māui, who tricks her into giving him her fire, and in doing so brings it into the human world. As proof of Reihana's skill in interconnecting traditional Māori elements and an art language readable to the Euro-American dominant international art world, *Mahuika* was exhibited in the *Global Feminisms* exhibition curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007. Addressing this issue in relation to the exhibition, Reihana explained that:

I suppose my work in terms of thinking about this notion of feminism, these particular works, their provocation lies in the fact that most marae are carved and made by men. And using photography and the computer, I am able as a woman to navigate my way through an area that would usually be done by men.¹⁵

From 2007, Reihana included male deities in her *Digital Marae*. *Maui*, who features in a range of stories is imaged in a dynamic pose, moving toward his viewers out of a cave like darkness, on a white surfboard. Produced in a decade characterized by photographic counter-representations of sexist and racist stereotypes by artists such as Renee Cox, James Luna, and Coco Fusco, Reihana's *Digital Marae* differed as she was not reimagining colonial stereotypes and histories but looking further back before these times to ancient Indigenous narratives and deities. Her conceptualizing of them as, in a sense, digital carvings as opposed to portraits, situates them within a ritualized traditional practice—*pou pou*—that is traditionally the domain of men. They also draw on feminist and decolonial approaches in her deployment of a returned gaze, the imaging of dominant, active, and heroic female bodies, and a visual aesthetic that seamlessly blends historical Indigenous and contemporary forms and references.

Reihana has also looked to colonial histories; in particular those featuring the Pacific voyages of Captain Cook in the late eighteenth century. *In Pursuit of Venus* (2012), originally a two-channel video, evolved over time to culminate in *In Pursuit of Venus (infected)* (2015), a panoramic, scrolling tableau style moving image work that comprises a slow panning monumental moving image narrative. Based on *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* (1804–1805), a nineteenth-century scenic wallpaper by the French designer Jean-Gabrieille Charvet that was inspired by Cook's published writings about the Pacific, Reihana brings to life over seventy vignettes featuring European representations of the death of Cook, Hawaiian hula, wrestling, and kava drinking, which are restaged within the sprawling panorama (Smallman 2018). Part living archive, part “What if?” imagining, with *In Pursuit of Venus (infected)* Reihana offers viewers a fresh take on early colonial encounters with Pacific people.

Also in the 2000s, Aotearoa-born Sāmoan artist Greg Semu developed a practice that draws on and restages well-known European and colonial paintings, such as Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper* (c. 1495–98) and Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1800–1801). Familiar with biblical stories and images from his childhood, Semu relocated from Aotearoa to Paris, to work as an artist and fashion photographer for over a decade in the 2000s, and became immersed with renaissance, baroque, and neoclassical paintings in his visits to art museums, which inspired him to replicate their aesthetics and symbolism in his photography.¹⁶ During this period, he also undertook residencies and commissions, which enabled him to develop his practice in new directions. *Battle of the Noble Savage* (2006) was commissioned by the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris with Semu as the inaugural artist in residence. The museum opened in the same year, bringing together collections including objects from the Pacific, Africa, and Asia, as well as from museums such as the Louvre, Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro and the Musée de l'Homme, combining them with contemporary Indigenous artists' work. Mindful that his audience would largely be European, Semu created a visual language they would understand. Interested in Pacific colonial histories and their legacies, as well as wanting to make connections with global imperialism and conquest, Semu's *Battle of the Noble Savage* also references ideas of eighteenth-century European Enlightenment philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot, whose writings collectively helped establish the trope of the Noble Savage and the related idea of Indigenous people viewed as “primitive,” exemplifying “man in the state of nature.” In the midst of this scene, a Māori chief wearing the *mataora* (full facial tattoo) rears up on his horse, evoking David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, as well as works by Prussian soldier of fortune and amateur water colorist Gustav von Tempsky, who played an active role in the New Zealand Land Wars of the 1860s, fighting for the British. Semu's works and their references are intended to highlight contemporaneous conquests globally, pointing to the Napoleonic Wars and the inter-tribal Musket Wars raging in Aotearoa New Zealand in the early nineteenth century. His monumental tableau draws on the rich red tones and shadow-play of Baroque painting, with the narrative complexity of neoclassical historical works. The series of photographic “history paintings” features an epic battle scene in progress between two opposing Māori groups, reminding viewers not to see colonial encounters within simplistic binaries.

Following this series, Semu undertook a residency in Noumea, New Caledonia, working with the local Kanak community. *Last Cannibal Supper, Cos Tomorrow We Become Christians* (2012) comprises a series of images that restage biblical narratives and iconography that reflect suffering and sacrifice, including the Pieta and Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. In the central work, Semu takes center stage as Christ in *The Last Supper*, his arms outstretched over a roasted pig; around him, his disciples are Kanak men and women. The impact of missionaries in the Pacific from the early nineteenth century, which in Polynesia in particular resulted in widespread conversion to Christianity in a relatively short timeframe, caused irretrievable loss of Indigenous knowledge systems that

were intricately connected to pre-Christian belief systems. This impact also drastically affected art production including carving, body adornment, performance, and *tatau* (tattoo), much of which functioned within ritualistic customary practices. Semu's ironic title reflects the ambivalence of the missionary urge to save the islander's souls from sinful practices like cannibalism, while replacing their religious belief system with a Christian God who was willing to sacrifice his own son to achieve his end, and have this sacrifice remembered in the Christian communion ritual, where congregations symbolically drink his blood and eat his flesh. *The Assassination of Atai*, another work from the series, makes an explicit connection between biblical accounts of the death and beheading of John the Baptist and the murder and presentation of the head of Kanak leader Atai to the French authorities in the 1878 uprising against French colonial rule in New Caledonia. "The head of Atai," the artist explains:

was for a long time hidden in the vast collections of French museums and thought to be lost or stolen. [It was found in July 2011 and returned to his descendants in New Caledonia in 2014.] I parallel the assassination of chief Atai to the biblical story 'The Head of John the Baptist', a rebel, whose head was beheaded and gifted.¹⁷

Sāmoan Japanese artist Yuki Kihara emerged in the early 2000s as an important voice. Kihara also looks back to ancient Indigenous creation stories and to colonial histories and representations, developing a compelling body of photographic and moving image works often centered on her body. Having trained in fashion design, Kihara produces work that pays particular attention to costuming and staging. She also draws on performance forms, including Sāmoan dance, and gendered female Polynesian tropes from the colonial period like the Dusky Maiden. Her series *Black Sunday* (2001) echoes prevailing representation practices of the time, featuring edited and reworked archival photographs of Pacific people, enhanced by adding colorful bands of graphic color, bright red lipstick and sunglasses, and colorful tee-shirts. The artifice of these prints highlights the constructed nature that underpinned the colonial origins of the tropes in the photographs.

Understanding her works, which she often creates in series, is further enhanced with reference to her *fa'afafine* identity. *Fa'afafine* has been translated as in the manner of or like a woman, and is a term often used to reference Sāmoans who were born anatomically male but who go on to live and identify as women. Fluid gender identities can be seen across the Pacific; and these have origins that can be traced to ancient lineages and creation stories. Phylesha Brown-Acton has coined the term MVPFAFF+ to signify the Indigenous Pacific gender nonconforming feminine identities *Mahu* (Hawaii and Tahiti), *Vakasalewalewa* (Fiji), *Palopa* (Papua New Guinea), *Fa'afafine* (American Samoa and Sāmoa), *Akava'ine* (Cook Islands), *Fakafifine* (Niue), *Fakaleiti/Leiti* (Tonga), and the plus symbol acknowledges that there are other Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian countries and cross-gendered identifications in the Pacific (Brown-Acton 2022).

Kihara's series *Vavao, Tales of Ancient Samoa* (2005) features the artist restaging moments of Sāmoan fagogo (traditional stories) drawing on the dark, lush aesthetics of Dusky Maiden black velvet paintings. Inspired by Paul Gauguin, this genre was pioneered by two expatriate artists painting in the 1930s in Tahiti, Moorea, and Sāmoa: Edgar Leeteg and Charles McFee. Their velvet paintings of Polynesian women characteristically "Polynesianized" Western sexualized imagery of women, and painted them against lush and verdant tropical settings. They became embraced as popular kitsch in tiki-bar and touristic culture from the 1960s and 1970s. Claiming agency over these representations and their legacy, Kihara sought to "re-occupy that gaze ... I come from a point of

view from the insider.”¹⁸ *Sina ma Tuna Sina and her Eel*, restages the story of *Sina and Her Eel* and features the artist looking out toward the viewer, naked but clothed by dark shadow, holding an eel that has been cut in two, its blood dripping down her arm. Her gaze looks mournful. In this work, she enacts a moment in a well-known Polynesian mythological narrative, the tale of Sina and Tuna (an eel), the origin story of the coconut palm in the Pacific. Sina, a young woman falls in love with Tuna, a half human half spirit (aitu) who takes the form of an eel and visits her when she bathes in a stream. Her brothers, disapproving of the relationship, kill Tuna. As she grieves for him, he tells her to plant his head in the soil and promises to always provide for her. It is said that from this spot, the first coconut palm grew, fruiting the coconut, which, when husked, has three distinctive marks that resemble the face of an eel. These works take on more complex meanings when considering Kihara’s gender identity.

Fa’afafine. In the Manner of a Women (2004/2020) is a series of five sepia-toned photographs featuring a triptych that frames the artist in the guise of an exotic colonial studio model. The triptych features the artist reclining on a chaise before a woven mat background and tropical palm foliage, looking at the viewer. Like the loaded precursors of such an odalisque image – Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (c. 1534) and Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1865) to



FIGURE 6.1 *Mahuika*, 2001, Lisa Reihana (Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tūteaurum Ngāi Tūpoto), C-type print, 1190 × 1990 millimeters. Auckland Art Gallery, 2002/3/5 Image. Courtesy of the artist.

name a few – Kihara's *Fa'afafine* is also steeped with meaning and symbolism. From left to right, the artist presents herself in the same pose, first in a grass skirt and beads, next nude as woman, and finally nude as *fa'afafine* with her penis showing.¹⁹ By simultaneously embodying both male and female traits, Kihara subverts binary understandings of gender identity, and by imaging her own body, she challenges objectifying representations of Polynesian women. In exposing herself in this way, she not only disrupts the colonial male gaze but also disturbs its heterosexual hegemony. In many Indigenous cultures gender diverse people have a place and roles that fit within social norms. In Sāmoa, for instance, alongside beauty pageants for women, there are also very popular pageants for *fa'afafine*. While parallels can be seen in Kihara's art practice with that of artists such as Cindy Sherman and Yasumasa Morimura, her representations of gender identity that explore her *fa'afafine* experiences contrast in that they perform or reflect her identity, both in the studio and the everyday.

Around 2006, Kihara traded in her Dusky Maiden interrogations for an austere black Victorian gown and a character she calls Salome. *Taualuga: The Last Dance* (2006) sees Kihara transitioning from photography to moving image. Referencing an important Sāmoan traditional dance the *taualuga*, often performed by a young woman of rank, Kihara dances the *taualuga* that occurs at the culmination of an event, characterized by its graceful movement. Salome has also appeared as a witnessing figure in the ongoing photographic series, *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?* (2013) (after Gauguin) and *Quarantine Island* (2021). In these works, the artist appears with her back to the audience in specific sites or places where colonial, imperialist, or environmental violence has taken place.

Globally the turn of the new millennium symbolized an apprehensive yet in some cases optimistic entry into an unknown future. However, within Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) an unknown future is not new and is navigable by maintaining an orientation toward the past so that it may inform the present and shape the future. This orientation can be seen in the work of contemporary Māori and Pacific artists, writers, and curators working in this first decade of the new millennium, employing Indigenous languages and decolonial frameworks and epistemologies. Across the Pacific the right to represent locally, globally, and virtually through artistic practice was intertwined with contemporary issues of Indigenous sovereignty, community, land ownership, and self-determination. The visual turn toward photographic and moving image and the critical role of the body in this decade were indicative of the groundswell of Māori and Pacific artists who were to continue working in these mediums in the years that followed.



FIGURE 6.2 Greg Semu, *The Battle of the Noble Savage*. ©Musée Quai Branly and Greg Semu. 2007.

Notes

- 1 Aotearoa is now the accepted Māori name for the land named “New Zealand” by Captain James Cook in 1770.
- 2 See Baker (1945).
- 3 See “2018 Census population,” *Stats NZ* (September 23, 2019); available online at: <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2018-census-population-and-dwelling-counts>. The fact that the percentages add up to more than 100% is apparently due to groups being so ethnically diverse—so some tick more than one of the ethnicity boxes. On this feature of ethnicity data, see: <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/population-projected-to-become-more-ethnically-diverse>.
- 4 *Holloway-Smith*, “The Single Object: The internet cable that connects us to the rest of the world” (April 1, 2020) available online at: <https://thespinoff.co.nz/partner/01-04-2020/the-single-object-the-internet-cable-that-connects-us-to-the-rest-of-the-world>
- 5 Staosielski (2015), xii–xiii
- 6 *Ibid.* xiii
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Mane-Wheoki (1999), n.p.
- 9 Te Ari Brennan, as cited in Brown (2006), 32.
- 10 Kāi Tahu whānau became an Incorporated Society in 2000/2001.
- 11 The term *ātea* has many meanings; however, it is used in this quote in relation to the *marae ātea*, which is the term for courtyard and public forum. It describes an open area in front of the *wharehau* (meeting house) where visitors are formally welcomed and issues are debated. Rakena (2003), 3–4.
- 12 Text quotes from credits of Lilo, *Kiss me Like You’ll Never See Me Again*.
- 13 “Top 16” refers to a specific feature on Bebo where users were able to rank their top sixteen “friends” who appeared as a list of thumbnail images on the profile page.
- 14 Rakena quoted in, “Pacific Washup to show at Busan Biennale,” *Massey University News* (September 2, 2008); available online at: https://ns-proxy1.massey.ac.nz/massey/about-massey/news/article.cfm?mnarticle_uuid=0C73E460-96BF-57FE-A9DF-A464084EFA45.
- 15 Reihana quoted in a public lecture during the run of *Global Feminisms*; see *Global Feminisms: Lisa Reihana* (March 2007); available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqRCuJUxpLo>.
- 16 Jacobs, Knowles, and Wingfield (2015), 140.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 141.
- 18 Kihara quoted in *Shigeyuki Kihara*: “Vavau: Tales of Ancient Samoa,” *Scoop Independent News*, culture section (July 6, 2004); available online at: <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/CU0407/S00024/shigeyuki-kihara-vavau-theses-from-ancient-samoa.htm>.
- 19 The series was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of New York and exhibited in 2008.

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2010–2020

Art for Abolition: Artist Statement

Patrisse Cullors

Los Angeles County has violated the human rights of Black and Brown people for decades. Its pro-police and pro-incarceration policies were, however, powerfully challenged when young organizers used art and activism to interrupt the building of two US\$3.5 billion jails in the 2010s (see White 2021). For a decade, organizations like Dignity and Power Now, Youth Justice Coalition, and Justice LA fought through art and activism to upend a system that impacted our lives from childhood to adulthood.¹

In 2012, I produced and directed an art piece *Stained: An Intimate Portrayal of State Violence* using the text of the eighty-six-page complaint against the LA County Sheriff's Department issued by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), archives of my brother's documents while he was incarcerated, and audio of the *Report of the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence* to illustrate the utter devastation communities experienced because of sheriff deputies' violence.² *Stained*, a performance work, traveled throughout Los Angeles County giving voice to a generation of incarcerated communities and their families and launched Dignity and Power Now, a grassroots abolitionist organization fighting for families impacted by incarceration. In 2017, one hundred jail beds were constructed by Justice LA members and spread across downtown streets in front of the LA County Board of Supervisors' offices.³ This guerilla public art protest expanded on the years of protest art produced by a generation of artists and organizers who grew up through the urban devastation and racist policing in Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s. The Jailbeddrop project (#jailbeddrop) became a conceptual art space for artists to discuss abolition, build towards abolition, and build art towards abolition. Poster art, poetry, billboards, performance art (such as my 2020 work *Prayer to the Iyami*), and music (a 2020 benefit album *Defund the Sheriff*, including contributions by Aloe Blacc, Vic Mensa, and others) became rallying calls for a generation who wanted an end to mass incarceration.⁴ In the last few years, these same organizations that used art and culture to build towards an abolitionist framework have succeeded in upending the jail construction project and have charted Los Angeles towards alternatives to incarceration (Pino 2019).⁵

Art from marginalized communities has always been the mainstay of movements and in Los Angeles we are reaping the benefits in real time.



FIGURE 7.1 Patrisse Cullors, *Prayer to the Iyami For Allegories of Flight, The Broad Year: 2020*. Image credit: Giovanni Solis.

Notes

- 1 See the respective websites: <https://dignityandpowernow.org>; <https://youthjusticela.org>; <https://justicelanow.org>.
- 2 For a video teaser of *Stained*, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmRn-MloWro>; on the ACLU report, see: <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-report-documents-eyewitness-accounts-brutality-against-los-angeles-county-jail>; and for the *Report of the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence*, which is available in printed form as a PDF, see: <https://ccjv.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/CCJV-Report.pdf>.
- 3 For media coverage of the jail bed action, see: <https://justicelanow.org/pressroom/media-coverage>.
- 4 A video of *Prayer to the Iyami*, which was performed outside The Broad museum on February 5, 2020, is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bco10-TKNlg>; on the “Defund the Sheriff” album, see Blistein (2020).
- 5 Also see County of Los Angeles, Alternatives to Incarceration Initiative: <https://ceo.lacounty.gov/ati>.

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Situating African Diasporic Art

Nana Adusei-Poku

Situating the time between 2010 and 2020 in Black art demands a look at the sociopolitical changes that took place prior to that period and with them the shifts in perspectives, conceptualization, and subjects addressed in African Diasporic art. I will anchor this discussion in the beginning in the so called “F” exhibition series, which kicked off in 2001 with *Freestyle* at the Studio Museum in Harlem, bringing the introduction of the term *post-Black* art by curator Thelma Golden. Spotlighting a younger generation of artists of African descent whose works varied in theme and style, *Freestyle* has since proven a transformative event for Black art discourse.¹ On this basis I will emphasize the shifts that happened during 2010–2020.

The *Freestyle* exhibition attempted to define a generation of artists but like any other project that tries to canonize and frame a specific group of artistic practices according to a new term, as in the concept of “institutional critique,” for example, it can, at times, limit our understanding of the art and rarely does justice to the works produced (Graw 2005). In contrast to “institutional critique,” the term post-Black is intrinsically connected to identity politics as well as the desire for Black art to achieve a new kind of recognition within broader art discourses and on the art market. This complicates its application because, although it argues against an ethnic gaze, it synchronically reproduces the very same limitations.² *Freestyle* therefore sits in relation with a complex history of nineteenth-century exhibitions that were organized around racial or cultural signifiers rather than artistic practices (Martin 2016).

Nevertheless, it has been argued that *Freestyle* set a new standard for how to exhibit Black art at the beginning of the twenty-first century, pay attention to individual practices, embrace the plethora of styles that are being produced rather than insisting on one form, style, or theme, and, not least, give a younger generation of artists a meaningful platform. The term post-Black reprised a centuries old desire to envision a multiplicitist, nuanced, and untethered Blackness freed from both the gratuitous violence and structural oppression that brought it into being. Post-Black art acknowledged and created a hybrid space for being Black in the arts. The artists that were associated with the *Freestyle* but in extension the following “F” shows open up a sensitivity for Blackness and a way of being in the world as a human of African descent, which stresses that it is not a paradigm that exists

on its own. What these artists of this generation stress is a reminder of the fact that there is no ideal Blackness or Black essence and that one's identity is constantly in flux without an ultimate source code, a perspective that has always existed but was not necessarily the main focus.³ A great danger that the vague framing of the term held was to undermine the achievements of Black artists by claiming to be beyond the problems of institutional racism and reproducing the very same structures.

Post-Black was described as a critical term, which tried to hold space for Black artists who did not want to be solely reduced to their skin color by critics, curators, gallerists, collectors, art historians, and museum curators. It did not mean that artists who exhibited under its umbrella were less interested in or influenced by the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, or that their pieces didn't deal with matters of Blackness or racial inequality. Rather, it demanded a shift in methodology for how to approach Black artists and their art and how to read it. Specifically post-Black rejects the notion of art as universal and sublime as well as the idea that the choices artists make are always shaped by their unique and un-swayed individuality.

Despite the potential and prominence of the term when it first emerged, it is now years after 2001 and post-Black has disappeared from any discussion around art, culture, or politics. However, the argument about the individual practices, their historical investments and aesthetic experimentations persists. The sparks that surrounded the first exhibition *Freestyle* are gone along with the hope that accompanied Barack Obama's 2007 presidential campaign, which pushed the term from "artistic post-black" to a form of "popular post-black" (Smalls 2020, 452) with a deeply changed meaning. The hopefulness that carried Obama's campaign turned into a sense of despair when, after Obama's second term, Donald Trump was elected as president in 2016 (Hall 1996, 471).⁴ Four years after the term post-Black entered the discourse, performance theorist and artist Malik Gaines remarked in the catalogue to *Frequency* that the term was ambiguously perceived, either as a disrespectful dismissal of the political achievements of the civil rights movement or as a marketing strategy for a newly appointed curator (D'Souza 2018, 5). The "F" series of emerging artists, which included the shows *Freestyle* (2001), *Frequency* (2005), and *Flow* (2008), was followed by an exhibition called *Fore* (2012–2013)—co-organized by Lauren Haynes, Naima J. Keith, and Thomas J. Lax—that did not mention post-Black art and instead highlighted the artists' birthdates (between 1971 and 1987) as well as their various means of expression. In other words, the term post-Black had already disappeared from the conversation, even within the context of the Studio Museum in Harlem where, at the time of writing, Golden remains at the helm.

Instead, another profound shift swept over the United States triggered by the killing of unarmed seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012 by the civilian vigilante George Zimmerman, who was part of a neighborhood watch program in Florida. Although Zimmerman was charged with murder, later, during the trial, he was acquitted when he claimed self-defense. Despite the US Department of Justice's civil rights violations investigation, no further charges were filed due to "insufficient evidence." In response to Zimmerman's acquittal, three radical Black organizers—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—created a Black-centered political movement project called #BlackLivesMatter. The acquittal of George Zimmerman was paralleled by the murder of Rekia Boyd (Chicago, 2012) and shortly followed by the murders of Mike Brown (Ferguson, 2014), Eric Garner (New York, 2014), Tamir Rice (Cleveland, 2014), Tanisha Anderson (Cleveland, 2015), Sandra Bland (Texas, 2015), Mya Hall (Baltimore, 2015), Walter Scott (North Charleston, 2015), and many more by white police officers (on and off duty), white vigilantes, and supremacists who weren't charged with any crimes. The police involved in these murders were often briefly suspended and later put back on duty or into the world. Increasingly, these crimes have been caught on cellphone cameras creating a form of public witnessing that turned Black death into a spectacle. Meanwhile, the murders of Black trans men and

womxn have been marginalized. What started as a hashtag shared on social media platforms quickly turned into furious protests, as in the example of Ferguson, where protesters were battered by military police with teargas and rubber bullets.

The murder of Brown and the subsequent uprising in Ferguson further propelled the conversation about police violence against Black people into the national arena. Young Black activists and organizers on the ground in Ferguson, despite the vicious police backlash against the protests, built a strong resistance against police brutality, gaining national and international support. BlackLivesMatter developed into an ongoing, global project organizing protests in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom to support the fight against systemic violence against (all) Black people. The organization now has forty chapters in the United States and beyond and is invested in awareness-raising projects alongside public protest.⁵

With the rising awareness of anti-Black racism and violence, the arts did not remain untouched. In a climate in which Black people had to actively fight and organize to establish their worth and the importance of their existence, the notion of “post-Black” became unthinkable if not even a folly from the past. The “F” series evolved into a different type of inquiry emphasizing that “contemporary art is deeply tied to its location, time and historical context (Studio Museum in Harlem 2012).” In 2015, the museum opened the exhibition *A Constellation*, organized by Amanda Hunt, which ran from November 12, 2015 to March 6, 2016. Hunt brought works by eight artists from the Studio Museum’s permanent collection, who emerged in the mid- to late twentieth century, together with a younger generation of artists who continue to be in conversation with the concerns around race, body, and class that the previous generation had explored. So, instead of proposing a profound and groundbreaking shift, as was possible in 2001, 2015 marked a much subtler intergenerational approach that aimed to address these themes. The impossibility of moving beyond the themes of race, body, and class is highlighted in the second paragraph of Hunt’s statement:

We are in the midst of a particularly fraught moment in the national conversation on these subjects both in the media and in private space. Some may imagine that many complex, centuries-old questions have been resolved since the birth of black nationalism and the civil rights movement—even though, in fact, we have only begun to unpack our collective history. This exhibition offers multivalent approaches to the profound complexity and nuance inherent in inquiries surrounding identity and existence (Studio Museum in Harlem 2012).

Hunt only insinuates the debates around post-race by addressing people who “imagine that many complex centuries old questions have been resolved,” but she suggests that collective history has to be consistently unpacked. Instead of calling for institutional, systemic change, Hunt’s focus is directed toward a dialogue that aims to address art-historical parallels such as the ways in which contemporary artists draw inspiration from the past. In terms of the shift that took place in the beginning of the millennium, for emerging Black artists, the fight for inclusion into the wider art world (and art market) was the dominant focus. With this priority came the discursive opening—in terms of styles, subjects, and political activism—of greater platforms for Black artists in the years that followed. The exhibition *30 Americans* is a suitable example of a discursive opening and an inclusion in an attempt to create a deracialized narrative of art. Premiering in 2008 at the Rubell Family Collection in Florida, and traveling since then through the United States, *30 Americans* is a group exhibition of work from thirty-one African American artists that looks at the experience of being American through African American perspectives. Such signals aiming to draw visitors attention toward the signifier of nationality rather than race have to be read in parallel with Obama’s presidency, which was for many African Americans an acknowledgment of their contributions, agency, and belonging to the United States. Other earlier exhibitions focused more on formal developments, for example, *Black Consciousness: Black Conceptual Art since*

1970, curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver at the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston, or Hamza Walker's 2008 *Black is Black Ain't* at the Renaissance Society.

While the Studio Museum in Harlem has been growing in stature and influence, the critique against mainstream museums has only increased since 2012 after the rise of the BlackLivesMatter Movement. These critiques have to do with a growing general consciousness of the systemic forms of exclusion and violence against Black people that take place on an epistemic, structural, and representational level *and* don't exclude the cultural sector. Several protests have taken place at the Whitney Museum of American Art alone, including the withdrawal of the Artist Collective *Howdoyousayyaminafrican Collective* from the 2014 Whitney Biennial (Heddaya 2014; R. Lee 2014). These protests were triggered, among many other reasons, by the white artist Joe Scanlan who posed as a Black imaginary artist called Donelle Woolford, the call for the removal of Dana Schutz's painting of Emmet Till called *Open Casket* in 2016 (D'Souza 2018), and the numerous protests staged by the activist group Decolonize this Place calling for the removal of Warren Kanders from the Whitney museum's board of directors (Heddaya 2014; R. Lee 2014).⁸ While activism in the 1960s aimed for a form of inclusion for Black artists in the mainstream canon, recent activism has shifted its focus to exposing and calling for direct change within the systemic structures that underlie the museum as a system (D'Souza 2018, 5).

In 2019 a report by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs on Workforce Demographics in the arts and culture sector showed that:

With respect to race/Hispanic origin, the respondent arts workforce is less diverse than New York City's population. Whites represent 66%, compared to their 32% share of the city's population. In contrast, Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians are underrepresented—10% of cultural workers identify as African American, compared to 22% of the city's population; 11% identify as Hispanic, compared to 29% of city residents; and 6% identify as Asian, compared to 14% of city residents. Respondents selecting the role "Community Engagement" most closely match the racial makeup of New York City as a whole. Service personnel such as Security, Retail/Merchandise, and Facilities are predominantly people of color, while Boards and Executive Leadership are 70% and 68% White (non-Hispanic), respectively.⁸

Black women are now holding positions in major art museums and taking on roles as directors of Biennials, Triennials, and other large scale exhibitions (Adeyemi 2020). But despite seeing Black curators appointed in key New York City art museums such as Naomi Beckwith (deputy director and chief curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum 2021), Adrienne Edwards, and Rujeko Hokley (both Whitney Museum of American Art 2018 and 2017), the presented numbers demonstrate the enormous sociopolitical disparity that exists when focusing on art on display in the cultural sector. These curatorial positions, despite their prestige and discursive impact, are representative and visible but registrars, conservators, or administrative staff, which are all part of these large-scale institutions, are often homogeneously white.

With the focus on different types of formal expression from figurative and abstract painting/sculpture, video, performance, installation, and sound in connection to the ongoing fight for equity and Black Life, the histories of these different forms of African diasporic art have found more platforms. Art history is practiced and enacted in epoch-defining group exhibitions such as *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980*, curated by Kellie Jones, which premiered in 2011 at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to now* at the MCA in Chicago, curated by Naomi Beckwith and Dieter Roelstraete in 2015; *We wanted a Revolution- Black Radical Women, 1965–85* at the Brooklyn Museum curated by Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hokley in 2017; Zoe Whitley's *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power 1963–1983* in 2017; and recently, Valerie Cassel Oliver's *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse* at Crystal Bridges Museum. The question about the relationship of

race and art is here posited against sociocultural developments that consistently highlight the interdependent play between aesthetics and political demands. While the latter survey exhibitions broke the ground for more art-historical engagement with Black artists art historian Bridget Cooks's argument that exhibitions focusing on African diasporic art are either organized via an ethnic signifier or aim at establishing art as universal (Cooks 2011) is nevertheless still valid. *Blackness in Abstraction*, curated by Adrienne Edwards at Pace Gallery New York in 2016, can be placed in the middle of this tension—returning to the question of the relationship between form and race through the focus on the color Black. A query that has been and will be part of the African diasporic art discourse for as long as the modern category of race exists. Traveling retrospectives like Jack Witten's *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting*, curated by Kathryn Kanjo in 2014, or *Procession: The Art and Life of Norman Lewis*, curated by Ruth Fine in 2015, and Kerry James Marshall's *Mastry*, which was co-curated by Dieter Roelstraete, Helen Molesworth, and Ian Alteveer in 2016, are examples of the interest and acknowledgment of Black artists in painting, which resulted in record sales on the secondary market.

In light of these exhibitions it is important not to forget trailblazers like the curator Okwui Enwezor, who shifted the discourse in 2001 with *The Short Century—Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994* at Villa Stuck Munich. The highly influential *Documenta XI* in 2002 and the 2015 Venice Biennial with the title *All the Worlds' Futures*, have also significantly changed the ways in which artists of African descent, whether working on the African continent or as part of the African diaspora, are shown—as part of a global network of artists of other cultural backgrounds and aesthetic foci. It was hence not a surprise that works by aforementioned artists like Kerry James Marshall were on view alongside, Fatou Kande Senghor, Adrian Piper, Sammy Baloji, John Akomfrah, Ellen Gallagher, Wangechi Mutu, and Carrie Mae Weems at the Venice Biennial. This shift is particularly important because Enwezor persistently refused to present African contemporary art in the primitivist tradition, either without much context or as a formal exercise, which exhibitions like *Seven Stories of Modern Art in Africa* by Catherine Delisse in 1995 at the Whitechapel Gallery London or *Africa Explores* by Susan Vogel at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1991 were unable to prevent. What Enwezor therefore proposed was a history of relations in the vein of Eduard Glissant, which contests the art-historical narratives of modernity.

Not so much the focus in regard to these large-scale exhibitions but part of the contemporary African art discourse was the introduction of the term *Afropolitan* in 2008, marking a hybrid group of culturally and intellectually educated individuals who are dislocated from their place of origin⁶ Enwezor conceptualizes the term as a space in-between: “[B]etween the categories of identity (ethnicity, religion, nation) lies the space of cosmopolitan African identity. This identity is global in its stance and transnational in its traversal of cultural borders” (Okeke-Agulu and Enwezor 2009, 25). This framing, which is based on the classical Greek idea of *kosmopolitês* (citizen of the world) can be understood as a form of antithesis to the *polis*—the state to which citizenship is intrinsically bound in Aristotelian philosophy. With it, Enwezor challenges existing monolithic ideas like cultural, national, or religious identity and emphasizes hybridity. Curators like Gabi Ngcobo who curated the 2018 Berlin Biennale pushed this perspective even further and not only utilized the platform as a space for research and experimentation but also explored with her curatorial team African diasporic perspectives. Despite this profound opening, the line between African contemporary art and African diasporic art is quite stiff. However, on closer inspection the blurs are much stronger than often perceived. *Nka—Journal for Contemporary African Art*, for example, founded by Enwezor in 1994 as a peer-reviewed journal published by Duke University Press, soon applied contemporary art in a more flexible way, including African Diasporic Art.

The realization of exhibitions and publishing of reviews, profiles, and art-historical analysis are key sites for the discourse and definitions of African diasporic art; but in the beginning of the 2010s another element contributed to the dissemination and knowledge gain of African

diasporic art: the Internet. Spearheaded by the already mentioned *Nka*, the online platform *Contemporary*, founded by Black Germans Julia Grosse and Yvette Mutumba, entered the scene in 2013. At first it focused exclusively on contemporary African art and has since like *Nka* developed into a knowledge repository for African contemporary and African diasporic art. Yet, it must be mentioned that many projects by curators and artists based on the African continent are often dependent on funding from their former colonial powers or other Western countries because of a lack of infrastructure and socioeconomic disparities. This reality, which includes particular power dynamics, does not affect African diasporic artists in the same way. Founded in 2007, one of the most progressive projects was Bisi Silva's (1962–2019) Center for Contemporary Art in Lagos, followed by the mobile art initiative Raw Material Company by Kojo Kouoh in 2008—settled in Dakar, Senegal. Both projects not only impacted artists of the African diasporas but also fostered curatorial practice on the African continent.

In 2011, Kimberly Drew's blog *Black Contemporary Art* spearheaded a digital focus—now easily found on social media platforms such as *Instagram*—in which curators and artists showcase their work through hashtags like #blackartist. With this influence the image worlds and collaborations between popstars like Beyonce Knowles and filmmakers such as Khalil Joseph or photographers like Tyler Mitchell for *Vogue Magazine US*, and experimental formats like *Random Acts of Flyness* (2018) by filmmaker Terence Nance, who invited a plethora of artists to collaborate on media streaming platforms such as HBO, reach millions of people outside of the traditional museum format, enhancing the aesthetic discourse. The actual representation of contemporary African diasporic art and artists in shows like *Empire* (2015) or Spike

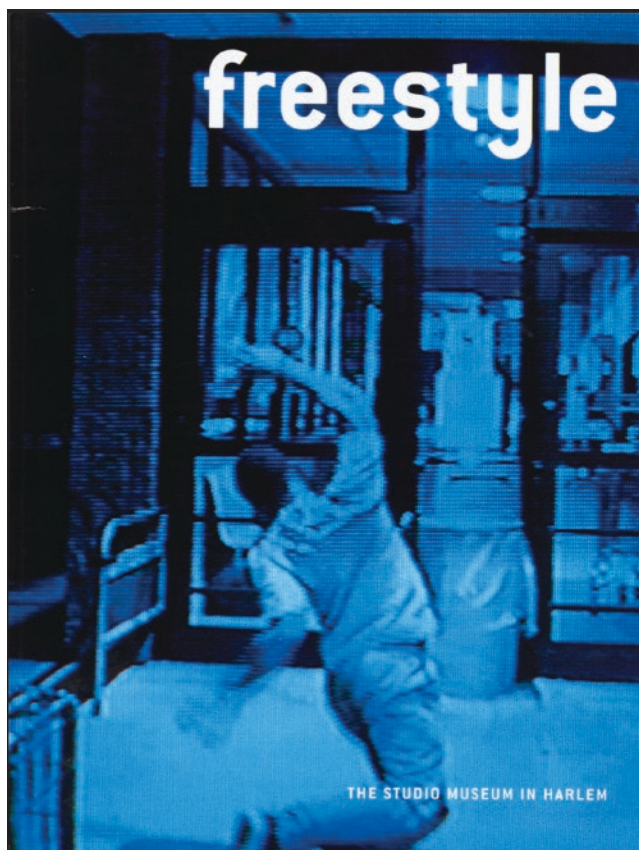


FIGURE 8.1 *Freestyle: The Studio Museum in Harlem*, 2001, Exhibition Catalogue cover. Gallery Association of New York State.

Lee's reboot of *She's Gotta Have It!* (2017) highlights the presence of Black art in popular culture, creative output, and overlap with other genres. Potentially one of the most important aspect about these collaborations is the network that African diasporic art spans, something that was fostered and addressed by Eliza Myrie's and Theaster Gates's *Black Artist Retreat* in 2013–2017. At first by invitation to Chicago the two artists gathered about 150 artists and curators to share space, ideas, concerns, and laughter, executed in various formats. The project culminated in a large scale three-day gathering in 2019 at the Park Armory in New York City, where it became less of an exclusive retreat and more of a commercial⁷/spectacularized gathering celebrating Black art and artists.

This opening up of a formerly exclusive retreat is a good example of how much Black aesthetic productions are, on the one hand, highly sought after and consumed while, on the other hand, the socioeconomic and sociopolitical disparities that I addressed earlier through the example of the police killings and systemic forms of exclusion in the cultural sector persist. This is the tension in which African diasporic art exists. It remains to be seen if the historic win that Black women artists like Simone Leigh and Sonja Boyce experienced by being awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennial in 2022 will be able to further push the discourse on Black art or if their acknowledgment will remain an exception in a culture that fosters exceptionalism rather than collective change. What is certain is that we have entered a time in which it is unthinkable that post-Black will make a return.

Notes

- 1 *Freestyle* gathered twenty-eight artists: Laylah Ali, John Bankston, Sanford Biggers (in collaboration with Jennifer Zackin), Mark Bradford, Louis Cameron, Rico Gatson, Deborah Grant, Kojo Griffin, Adler Guerrier, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Tana Hargest, Kira Lynn Harris, David Huffman, Jeral Ieans, Rashid Johnson, Vincent Johnson, Jennie C. Jones, Arnold Kemp, Dave McKenzie, Julie Mehretu, Adia Millett, Kori Newkirk, Camille Norment, Senam Okudzeto, Clifford Owens, Nadine Robinson, Susan Smith-Pinelo, and Eric Wesley.
- 2 Thelma Golden was fully aware of this contradiction when she and Ligon coined the term; see Golden (2001, 14).
- 3 For historical perspectives that share this position see Lewis and Waddy (1969, 1971).
- 4 In 2008, the largest financial crisis in the United States since the Great Depression of the 1930s coincided with Barack Obama's election and inauguration as the first Black president in US history, marking a shift in the representation of power. The election that brought Obama into office opened a debate about the notion of race and the meaning of Blackness, which was accompanied by a great disillusionment for many Black individuals within the United States. It was under Obama's leadership (and noted vocal absence) that so many murders of Black US citizens took place at the hands of the police and movements like #BlackLivesMatter were started, in response to the consistent police violence and the killings of Black children, womxn, gender-non-conforming people, and trans men. Obama's campaign slogans, "Change we can believe in" and "Yes we can," sound unfathomable in the early 2020s because the systemic violence that people of color endure has reached an even greater dimension and the country is more split than ever. The detention camp at Guantanamo Bay is still active and although US troops withdrew from Afghanistan in June 2011, US intervention in the Middle East still hasn't ended. The white liberal notion that the United States had entered a post-racial era is cynically laughable now but was seriously debated in 2008.
- 5 Also see "Black Lives Matter," 2020, https://blacklivesmatter.com/?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=010175f92375cc893ea9f30cc5673f5cc01ad1e1-1593099657-0-AVIFrIdn2ZrqceTYhPIFJr154t-AzC_GltW5r5AvfHTt9SAkoutL4-dHN-SCZlZveEy1jaACQUL3_gciky-Bfqf8Ua2l3Ax8RGZYABbW_IkLNphRCt6CCueVelnC2WPUfeIUcMNP33FAfK_Ut7_

TzuwRpIDH484SfeTTyU9xmtzjx0TXUdfI6zKGOI00aAhzS4de0JJt1xpjthjUx0HAgtr635HT7Nc6Z0a4QLckhp53lWolflARk4fWJbM2-Y8_Lsxrt6Rpksr2FIQNAj_3AEMCTB8s_af0oTFPWsdlTBoteDtbopyS8LkSwdAg1Tfh2v-UrjwDhIBp_dnnUPTOl676U, accessed May 9, 2023.

6 For an in-depth conversation of Afropolitan see Adusei-Poku (2021, 33–36).

7 The event was accessible via pre-purchased tickets.

8 See Decolonize this Place, “9 Weeks Of Art in Action—DTP” (June 22, 2020). Activist Organization. Available at: <https://decolonizethisplace.org/9weeksofartinaction2>, accessed May 9, 2023.

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Part II



THEMES

Institutions/Ontology

COLONIALISM

“The Whole World in his Hands”: A Decolonial Approach to European Concepts of Art

Claire Farago

Preamble: Decolonizing the Art Complex

This chapter asks how contemporary art practices are connected *historically* to modern European colonialism, the policy and practice of domination in the socioeconomic and political sphere that includes imposing religion, language, and other cultural practices over other peoples and resources. Of course, European states are not the only ones that created colonizing empires, a practice known since ancient times all over the world, but European colonial practices hold a unique place in the history of the modern idea of art. It takes a lot of work to establish the relationships among abstract concepts, politics, and economics in the historical record, as will become clear in the following discussion. Rather than proposing a two-way structure of oppression and resistance, as was characteristic of postcolonial approaches to these questions in the 1980s and 1990s, in recent years, the critique of the Eurocentric episteme has come to focus on the “coloniality of power” and the “coloniality of knowledge,” widely adopted concepts initially developed by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (1930–2018) to designate forms of colonialism that survived historical colonialism (Quijano 2000; see further Mignolo 2007). Where the focus was formerly on Europe as colonizer and the displacing gaze of the colonized, more recent decolonial efforts in the visual register that study complex global networks of cultural exchange along many vectors using pluralistic approaches to writing history. Changing the structure of a field is even more difficult than contributing new studies that leave the structure intact. Why should anyone bother?

Climate disruption/crisis/emergency is an existential threat facing the entire planet. At the same time, populism and authoritarianism are surging—brutal proof of the lethal effects that an ideology of cultural superiority has assumed in the twenty-first century. We individually have the responsibility and possibly the power to change this if we work together, but as hegemonies and their terrorisms evolve, so too must efforts to mitigate the ecological and humanitarian disaster we have inherited on planet Earth. One of the major fault lines in the historical record—and the focus of this chapter—concerns colonialist assumptions that the “arts of the civilized” surpass and supersede the “artifacts of the primitive.” The epistemic trauma that separated “art” from “artifact” in this Eurocentric discourse continues to haunt the present even when the categories

themselves are avoided. A concrete example can demonstrate the continuing effect of colonialist assumptions, but also the ability of artists, art historians, curators, and critics to change the status quo. I begin by quoting part of an essay published in 2004 from the British newspaper *The Guardian*, by the then-current director of the British Museum, Neil McGregor. In this essay, entitled (surely unselfconsciously) “The Whole World in Our Hands,” McGregor, discussing the Museum’s Benin bronze collection, notes that:

A British legation, traveling to Benin at a sacred season of the year when such visits were forbidden, was killed ... In retaliation, the British mounted a punitive expedition against Benin. Civil order collapsed (Baghdad comes to mind), the plaques and other objects were seized and sold, ultimately winding up in the museums of London, Berlin, Paris and New York. There they caused a sensation. It was a revelation to western artists and scholars, and above all to the public, that metal work of this refinement had been made in 16th-century Africa. Out of the terrible circumstances of the 1897 dispersal, a new, more securely grounded view of Africa and of African culture could be formed ... I don’t know where else a visitor can apprehend Africa in so many contexts. A collection that embraces the whole world allows you to consider the whole world. That is what an institution such as the British Museum is for (McGregor 2004).

When the International Congress of the History of Art (CIHA) met in Melbourne in January 2008, the first time this major international conference of art historians was held outside Europe or North America, the theme was cultural interaction. Two of the most important questions on the conference agenda were the very vexed problems of repatriation and globalization, both of which are the subjects of the paragraph just cited by McGregor, one of the Congress’ keynote speakers. It is hard to imagine a speaker less sympathetic to these concerns from the dispossessed culture’s point of view than McGregor, who defends his institution’s refusal to return its plundered treasures by repeatedly citing its obligation to preserve large portions of the world’s artistic heritage that have somehow “wound up” in his museum when Benin’s “civil order collapsed.”

McGregor denies the fundamental fact that any consideration today of the peripatetic life of objects carries very grave responsibilities of an historical, critical, and ethical nature toward the individuals, communities, and societies, whether extant, dispersed, or disappeared, whose cultural patrimonies we continue to stage art historically and museologically for our own purposes in the present. As objects are abstracted from a receding horizon of events, they enter new and constantly proliferating relationships. Here are the facts: in 1897 British soldiers ransacked and burned the Benin Royal Palace, located in present day Nigeria. Afterwards, dealers and shippers distributed the artifacts to western European museums.¹ In the case of McGregor’s vision of the British Museum, these new relationships are determined by the collector/conqueror: after British troops wiped out Benin people in a punitive action stemming from British disrespect for Benin’s sacred customs and laws, the world gained appreciation of the African art it acquired as a result.

If what we call “African art” or art of “the Renaissance” or “the Baroque” were “reframed” in terms of the paths taken by the cultural artifacts on their ways to our archives or collections, the history of art would tell a very different story, and the ways in which scholars, curators, and museum directors are implicated by such decolonial practices would be quite different from what they are commonly articulated as being. Taking these circumstances into account would have a profound affect not only on art history and curatorial practices but also on contemporary art (which rests on these implications and presupposes these histories). The organization of international exhibitions such as biennales have repeatedly drawn harsh criticism as a neocolonial practice catering to highly privileged jet-setters while at the same time excluding local artists who for reasons of education and lack of material resources cannot compete with the “standard forms of post-conceptual and lens-based art” (Stallabrass 2004, x).

In his widely cited exhibition catalogue on the “Global Contemporary,” Hans Belting famously claimed that the “dualism of art and artifact was put aside when contemporary art production in a professional sense had become general practice and was no longer the West’s prerogative” (Belting 2013, 181).² How is the privileged German art historian Belting in a position to declare that the effects of centuries of European cultural chauvinism have been eradicated? The “prevalence of Western canons in art history,” writes Ruth Simbao, historian of African art at Rhodes University, South Africa, pushing back on Belting’s argument, cannot simply come to a close just because “authors steeped in this privileged art world announce its supposed demise, implying that they are willing and perhaps key agents of this apparent change” (Simbao 2015, 236).

What could be so offensive about Belting’s inclusive remarks to those situated in the formerly colonial shadows of the Western artistic legacy? Through a mixture of political activism and humor, performance and installation artists who identify with the culturally, socially, and politically underrepresented and/or oppressed took an early lead in criticizing museum practices aligned with the colonality of power. I cite three famous interventions in US museums to introduce the historical issues that have been driving institutional critiques of colonality for over three decades. I take my cues from more recent decolonial writings by indigenous authors who insist on identifying the position from which one speaks, *not* to focus on individual or collective trauma but to point up structures of relation or oppression to colonality (Liboiron 2021, viii). In his groundbreaking performance/installation *The Artifact Piece* (1987/1990), James Luna (1950–2018), an American artist of Payómkawichum, Ipi, and Mexican-American descent, satirized the representation of Native Americans by lying naked, except for a loincloth, in an ethnographic display case filled with sand, shells, and his own personal artifacts, on view in the permanent collection of the San Diego Museum of Man. In another remarkable intervention, the Mexican-American performance artist/writer Guillermo Gómez-Pena paired with the Cuban-American artist/writer Coco Fusco to create the performance art piece *Couple in the Cage: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992–93), where they pretended to be a human zoo in a touring display mimicking a circus sideshow of a bygone era. In both cases, viewers were caught off guard by design. A slightly different approach to undermining colonial history written from the victor’s point of view was adopted by Fred Wilson, who describes himself as of African, Native American, European, and Amerindian descent. Wilson created a series of mocking museum displays to show how museums silently reinforce racist beliefs and behavior. The first and most often cited of these interventions, *Mining the Museum* (1992–1993), staged at the Maryland Historical Society using its own collection, juxtaposed ornate colonial silver objects with slave shackles, and portrait busts of famous white Americans with empty pedestals identifying famous Black Marylanders who received no such honor and had no presence whatsoever in the museum’s collection.

As these by-now iconic acts of artistic civil obedience can begin to suggest, the decisive element in establishing new social relations through writing about or making art is not the restitution of past suffering by the present but, more importantly, acknowledging and articulating the impossibility of ever fully possessing the past. Such a more explicitly dialectical cultural history, by which I mean a concern with opposing forces, would acknowledge that rethinking the past can open the present to a better future (Caygill 2004, 93). But then, the question becomes: better for whom? The power of the director of the British Museum to enable the institution to evoke, elicit, and stage our desires depends on maintaining the fiction that it is better for the Benin bronzes to remain in London rather than in Africa. To remain in London is better than being “orphaned,” McGregor writes in the same article, because “The British Museum must now reaffirm its worldwide civic purpose. That must be the goal that shapes our future plans. Where else can the world see so clearly that it is one?” (McGregor 2004).

The underlying argument is that art is that which makes us one. But at what cost? And whose version of art? Most Benin bronzes entered European ethnological collections such

as the British Museum, not art museums. If the very category “art” is the product of history, then we all share the ethical responsibility as producers of knowledge to understand how our knowledge shapes the institution. McGregor retired from his post as director of the British Museum in 2015 to become founding director of the Berlin museum Humboldt Forum, which implicitly preserves the longstanding Eurocentric hierarchy in housing everything that is “non-European art.” The Humboldt Forum has experienced considerable birthing problems in trying to remain wedded to the colonialist philosophy of art that McGregor defended ten and twenty years ago (see Bredekamp 2013, 2021).³ At this writing, the Humboldt Forum uses an image of a Benin bronze head on its website to introduce the “global art” collection. The digital display identifies its provenance simply as “looting” and the accompanying narrative cryptically informs viewers that “the Benin Dialogue Group is negotiating for the return of these works of art.”⁴

Herein lies the problem: “universalism” is the heritage of Enlightenment metaphysics rooted in ancient Graeco-Roman thought and modern colonialism. There are deep tensions between the liberal ideals of ethnological and cultural universalism, on the one hand (“we are all one”), and racial and cultural injustice, on the other (epitomized in the looting of Benin Palace and its aftermath). Decolonial writers and art practitioners demand scrutiny and reconceptualization of colonialist assumptions while McGregor and others who likewise wish to integrate past and present in our accounts of global art, find the values associated with the same categories and goals to be self-evidently “universal.” The immediate origins of these categories about individual and collective cultural identity are in nineteenth-century European theories of national, biological, and social development that are, regrettably, making a comeback in some circles today.⁵

A closely related problem is the binary model of center and periphery that grants privilege to European civilization, a position to which McGregor’s editorial about the value of universal art museums in certain urban centers but not others testifies. Even in the act of admitting “looting” and “facing the consequences of the past,” as the current website of the Humboldt Forum does, this anodyne version of a decolonial narrative does not acknowledge the uneven economic, social, and political conditions that affect the circulation, reception, and use of different cultural traditions, signifying systems, worldviews, and contexts of use to this day. These differentials are what need to be unpacked if the contemporary art world is truly to become the inclusive, egalitarian global practice that Belting and other Europeanists, but also decolonizing curators/critics aware of unequal conditions stemming from colonialism, have envisioned since the 1980s. Has anything fundamentally changed institutionally speaking since McGregor articulated his views in 2004? In the case of the Benin bronzes, the answer is yes, thanks to activist artists, scholars who have meticulously documented their history after 1897, and Nigerian officials who have put pressure on European institutions. The first exhibition of twenty-six looted treasures, repatriated from the Quai Branly Museum in Paris, went on view in Benin City, Nigeria, in March 2022, while the Smithsonian Institution in the United States simultaneously announced plans to return “most” of its looted bronzes, the Humboldt Forum reversed its earlier decision and will not show its Benin bronzes, and, in October 2021, Nigeria’s cultural minister announced plans to receive over 1,000 Benin bronzes from Germany in 2022, which will be displayed at the new Edo Museum of West African Art in Benin City (Abrams 2021; Greenberger 2021; Holmes 2021; Onabolu 2022). Even the British Museum has announced plans to lend or return its bronzes (Brown 2020). And the momentum is building and diversifying as museums respond to calls for the repatriation of looted, stolen, and other improperly acquired works of art (see Curry 2023; Loos 2022).⁶ Of course there is no consensus, the issues are complex, the looting continues, and even the most ambitious efforts to return burial remains and sacred objects to Native Americans, established in the United States in 1990 by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), have been less effective than hoped.⁷

Transcultural Approaches to Early Modern Categories of Analysis

What would make contemporary art practices “global” without reinstalling the coloniality of power in displaced form? Beyond the public act of restitution acknowledging the consequences of the past, there is still the pressing need to contextualize how formerly colonized objects functioned in their societies of origin, circulated in trading networks, and reached their current destinations. Framing historical inquiry transculturally asks about these various connections among things, peoples, and ideas. Transcultural decolonial approaches also consider how gaps and discontinuities of historical understanding are to be negotiated. To that end, the focus of discussion in this section is how Eurocentric models of universalism are grounded in the binary of art versus artifact.

We usually identify the current era of globalization with the rise of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century, but historically a global network of commerce accelerated by European colonialism and capitalism (they are not synonymous) was already established in the sixteenth century and a world system of trade is much older (Abu-Lughod 1989). However, the classic study dealing with the formation of the modern system of the arts by Paul O. Kristeller published in 1951–1952, did not consider global trade, the circulation of objects and ideas, or anything remotely resembling the artifacts found in early modern European collections such as *Wunderkammern* and curiosity cabinets (Kristeller 1951, 1952). Kristeller read European writings on the arts for laymen, treatises comparing the arts, treatises on aesthetics, and discussions of problems of the arts in art academies. He rightly emphasized the primary importance of oral culture. Based on his extensive familiarity with these sources, he argued that modern aesthetics conceived in terms of taste and sentiment, genius, originality, and creative imagination emerged from sixteenth-century discussions of the arts but did not assume their definite modern meaning before the eighteenth century. In this narrative, the modern term “aesthetics,” derived from the ancient Greek αἰσθητικός (*aisthetikos*) meaning sense perception, was coined by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762), whose unfinished Latin work *Aesthetica* was published in the 1750s (Baumgarten 1750–1758).

Kristeller also did not mention that, concurrently, at the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, Charles de Brosses argued that “fetishism,” defined as the direct worship of earthly material objects for their endowment of divine powers “capable of satisfying mundane desires” was the unifying characteristic of primordial religion (De Brosses 1760). For his study of African “fetishism,” De Brosses drew on existing discussions of “idols” as false images, such as Francis Bacon’s (1620) *New Organon*, which, in turn, drew on sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation writings by those suspicious of any tendency to venerate images within the Catholic traditions of the time. De Brosses’s study of non-Christian material culture as religious superstition complemented other Enlightenment contributions to an emerging field of interest in the origins of society, such as David Hume’s *Natural History of Religion* (1757) and Giambattista Vico’s *La Scienza nuova* (1725), which distinguished rational from irrational understandings of the world in the following terms: “for man, by understanding, articulates his own mind and comprehends those things, but by not understanding, he makes those things from himself and, by transforming himself, becomes those things” (Vico 2020, 149).

Both “aesthetics” and “fetishism,” then, are eighteenth-century neologisms devised to understand the cultures being dominated through European colonization. They developed to theorize certain subjective processes in perceiving “sensuous materiality,” as argued in an important series of articles by William Pietz published in the 1980s (Pietz 2003, 17). In the historical record these two discussions were dependent on one another and yet its authors showed no awareness of their co-constructed relationship, as Pietz recognized. The questionable reasons for the distinction between “art” and “artifact” were consequently lost from view in the historical record, later tucked into the seams between art history and

cultural anthropology. The criteria that define the categories are, in the case of “fetishes,” denigrating misrepresentations of their cultures of origin. In 1995, Frances Connelly aptly described this Eurocentric dynamic operating in Enlightenment texts as the “classical norm cast[ing] the ‘primitive’ as a dark mirror image of itself” (Connelly 1995, 9). The understanding of primitive religion as the opposite of Western philosophy, and “primitive” as opposed to “civilized” art, remained unchanged at the end of the nineteenth century (Pietz 2003, 9). In the case of art, the critical values were inverted in the early twentieth century, when avant-garde movements rejected the academic art system and embraced “primitive art,” but the epistemology remained in place. Arguably, avant-garde appropriation of “primitive art” (a term coined in the late nineteenth century) was just as Eurocentric as labeling African masks and other extra-European material culture as “idols,” “fetishes,” and “artifacts” that belong in natural history museums. The contribution of these modes of thought to the coloniality of knowledge has only been acknowledged in art discourse in the past quarter century.

The Artist’s Imagination Viewed Transculturally

Is it sufficient to look only as far back as the eighteenth century to understand the binary of art versus artifact? This section examines reframing of indigenous culture from the colonizer’s point of view that took place prior to the Enlightenment. The widely invoked argument, cited earlier, that modern concepts of art and society originated with Enlightenment philosophers, needs to be revised in one important respect, for reasons I can only briefly summarize in the present context.⁸ The existing account misses the transcultural religious, political, and economic framework in which the distinctions arose two centuries earlier during the initial period of European colonial expansion when extractive capitalism was first practiced on a global scale. Those unfortunate enough to be living in places rich in natural resources sought by extractive capitalist ventures fared badly then and even worse today when catastrophic climate change adds to centuries of environmental degradation that is destroying lives, lands, and lifeways (Nixon 2011). The task today is to grasp the brutal reality of planetary interdependency *and* its emancipatory possibility (Arboleda 2020). What analytical tools are adequate for the task? Anthropologist and historian of colonial studies Ann Laura Stoler calls it “concept work” (Stoler 2016, 5–8).

This section identifies occluded continuities and profound ruptures that have been obstacles rather than openings to imagine the future differently. Art defined as the object of individual aesthetic contemplation is a relatively recent construct that developed over several centuries. The narrative that follows is very different from Jacob Burckhardt’s nineteenth-century praise of individualism personified in the figure of the autonomous (unmarked white male) artist, even though Burckhardt himself examined ritual, popular images, and other cultural activities with regard to a wider range of purposes than the category usually implied by “work of art” (Burckhardt [1860], 1956, 1990).⁹ In its Christian theological formulation, the “truth” of the artistic representation was crucial for it justified the use of images in religious worship.

Most scholarly interest in the historical literature has focused on the increasing agency granted to the artist’s sensate judgment in the process of artmaking because the artist’s autonomy and freedom to invent are central to modern, secular notions of art. The new discourse on art that developed in the fourteenth century and later, in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, claimed an increasingly independent role for the artist but the Christian context in which all sacred images functioned continued to inflect these discussions in specific ways. The perennial challenge was to establish the ontological status of the artistic representation. The understanding of the artist as the agent solely responsible for an image of Christ or another sacred subject introduced a serious problem: What guarantees the (divine, eternal) truth of a representation made by humans, given that humans are fallible? In the mid-sixteenth

century, the Catholic Church tried to redirect the increasing freedom recently accorded the artist, recognizing it as quite literally dangerous because it diverted the attention of worshippers away from their devotions and toward admiration for the artist and their magnificent artifice. At the other extreme of the sixteenth-century image theory controversies, Protestant Reformation writers developed sophisticated theological arguments on the dangers of idolatry that protested the accumulation of material things as an issue of social justice (Eire 1986).

What is at stake in these theological arguments is the ontological distinction between a lifeless commodity and the living, divine presence in human form. While they may delight or inspire fear, because idols are resemblances, they disguise their true ontological status. While Protestant Reformation theologians denounced lavish religious displays and material aids as idolatrous, Catholic missionaries levied charges of idolatry against their converts, the newly colonized subjects of European monarchies. Relationships of power materialized in such complex exchanges simultaneously taking place at close range and over long distances. The following discussion focuses on new distinctions among humans that were indebted to Aristotle's *Politics*, a treatise on government based on the constitutions of ancient Mediterranean city-states (polities).

The city-state for Aristotle was a substitute for the entire human community and understood to be the necessary condition of civilized life (Kennedy 2021).¹⁰ He classified governments by their kind of rule and justified the enslavement of those who had committed some act for which the punishment was slavery because "civil slaves" provide a necessary labor force for every civil society. He also defined a second kind of slave "by nature" which refers not to an institutionalized practice but to a category of humans who are unable to govern themselves because they are constitutionally incapable of independently exercising the fully human powers of reasoning (Aristotle, *Politics* 1254b, 16–28, 1259b, 27–8; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1143a, 11–18, 1143a, 1254b, 1259b). In 1510, the Scottish theologian John Major (also spelled Mair) applied Aristotle's obscure definition of a "slave by nature" in the *Politics* to evaluate the mental capacity of indigenous peoples in the Americas (Pagden 1982, 27–56, 1990, 16–33). The central issue was "property" or, in the language of jurisprudence, *dominium rerum*, in accounting for the origins of society. The "true nature" of Amerindians also had obvious economic implications: if they were not fully rational creatures, they could not own property and may be legitimately subject to enslavement, conveniently providing the Spanish crown with grounds for a "just war" beyond evangelization and an ample labor force to extract silver and gold from Mexican and Peruvian mines. On the other hand, the ability of Amerindians to be Christianized depended on their fully human (fully rational) status. The discourse on slavery cast in these conflicted terms also spread by word of mouth and is documented in hundreds of legal cases involving Amerindians and Africans since the early sixteenth century particularly in slave trading centers like Seville, Spain, and Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.¹¹

It was necessary to show that Amerindians were actually fully human and not merely human in appearance to guarantee that they had the same natural rights.¹² The Dominican missionary Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566) was the most famous European apologist for indigenous peoples, best known for his polemical account of Spanish atrocities in the Indies, *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*), first published in 1552. Reprinted many times, it fueled resistance to Spanish domination and familiarized readers across Europe with the main features of his arguments concerning the mistreatment of Amerindians.¹³ In a historic debate held the previous year in Valladolid, Spain, Las Casas defended the indigenous population he was tasked with converting to Christianity against charges that they were "slaves by nature." In his *Apologetica historia* written during the same period, he described indigenous communities according to Aristotle's requirement for a polis composed of social classes, which he divided into seven by region: workmen, artisans, warriors, rich men, priests, judges, and a ruler. Las Casas constructed an image of Amerindian societies as independent collectives each organized in a hierarchy of occupations that depend on *techne*, the "mechanical arts" whose

purpose is to adapt the environment to meet humans' special needs. The more gifted and hardworking people are, the more splendid a community's material culture.

Las Casas argued that the indigenous peoples possessed skill in the mechanical arts, which were a function of the rational soul ("*habitus est intellectus operativus*") requiring the use of deliberation (practical wisdom).¹⁴ In the same words he used to refute the charge of "slaves by nature" by elevating Amerindian societies to the status of a true polity, however, Las Casas reframed indigenous culture on European terms and (no doubt inadvertently) constructed an inferior collective identity for American indigenous peoples relative to the identity of Europeans. Las Casas was arguing for the rationality of indigenous peoples based on a broad definition of *techne* in the *Politics* that covers all occupations that adapt the environment to meet human needs. By contrast, in the sixteenth-century Italian literature on art, the higher status claimed for painting, sculpture, and architecture was based on their association with natural and moral philosophy, as opposed to their medieval classification among the mechanical arts. Arguments over the true nature of artistic judgment underlie these polemics just as they did in Spain and its colonized American territories (see Goffen 2002; Summers 1981; *Scritti* 1971–1977; *Trattati* 1961).

For most of the sixteenth century, European artists were not concerned with proving their rationality, which was not in question, but with raising their social and intellectual status. Then Church reform put the rationality of European artists on the line, although the context was very different from that faced by indigenous peoples in the Americas (see Preziosi and Farago 2012, 6–42, 98–111). A defining moment in the role traditionally granted to artists to interpret sacred subject matter came when the ecumenical Council of Trent, organized by the Church of Rome, issued its famous decree on sacred images at its final session on December 3–4, 1563 (Council of Trent 1941, 216). The Council of Trent was suspicious of artistic license, understood as an explicit display of artifice for its own sake. The distinctions were made partly in response to charges of idolatry by Protestant reformers that the authors never mention directly; in fact, they appear to agree with their fundamental assumption that outward visual signs mirror inward states of mind. Ecclesiastical writers aligned with the Tridentine decree embraced naturalism, which sustained a move in the visual arts toward a scientific approach to representation. Meanwhile, images that did not conform to these criteria, formerly praised as ingenious inventions and displays of artistic license, were treated as signs of the supposedly irrational imaginations of those who produce idols, the grotesque, "hieroglyphs," allegories, distorted human and animal figures. All kinds of images were now held to be lacking in the rational principles governing the representation of figures and space, including knowledge of anatomy, classicizing theories of proportion, pictorial perspective, and other features that became the foundation of academic artistic training throughout Europe and beyond for the next three centuries. Enlightenment thinkers assertively favored rational principles based on the same neo-Aristotelian theory of cognition.¹⁵ Upon entry into the early modern curiosity cabinet or *Wunderkammer*, objects that did not conform to these criteria were evaluated in terms of their appearance as signs of the subtle creative power of the human imagination or signs of moral corruption and demonological possession—or even both at the same time.

Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti of Bologna and his contemporaries who fleshed out the recommendations of the Council of Trent might also have been informed by the new, widely distributed illustrated genres of printed cultural geographies, travel literature, and maps made for armchair traveling (Figure 9.1, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*). Lavishly illustrated, large-format cultural geographies and well as more portable formats attracted a considerable audience by the late sixteenth century, and sales were booming in the 1600s (see Davies 2016; Gaudivo 2008; Leitch 2010; Schmidt 2015; Wilson 2005). Even if most Europeans were not literate by modern standards, these vernacular texts with extensive illustrations made information about peoples newly discovered by Europeans widely accessible.¹⁶ Surekha Davies (2016, 227) calls attention to the importance of cities in this literature



FIGURE 9.1 Georgius Braun and Franz Hogenberg, Mexico and Cuzco, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, engraving and etching. Antwerp: G. Van den Rade, 1575. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library / CC BY 4.0.

for readers familiar with Aristotle's *Politics*. For other readers as well, visual ethnographies organized by city or state invited comparative judgments on different peoples' levels of civility according to categories derived from ancient writers such as Pliny, Solinus, Herodotus, and above all, Aristotle because he wrote about the origins of society in similar terms.

The early modern explosion of print culture is comparable to our own information age. This illustrated literature was the successor to centuries of mapmaking and travel writing about other worlds where eyewitnesses encountered all kinds of monstrous humanoid creatures. Christian doctrine held that no creature capable of existence had been omitted from the divine plan. According to a myth widespread in medieval literature and art, "wildmen" were creatures on the borderline between man and beast due to degeneration (not evolution). Like present-day mass media, the popular and profitable printed publications varied widely in accuracy partly because such older confabulated ideas remained in play and partly because the new illustrated literature typically involved many agents under the direction of publishers who bought accounts of various kinds and commissioned artists (who by and large had not themselves seen the various lands) to illustrate them. Sometimes the narrative source painted a rosy picture because it was written to encourage investment in land and resources.¹⁷ These accounts were persuasive because of the way they were presented visually and verbally. Literary credibility is what literary scholar Mary Baine Campbell calls a sort of "intertextual verisimilitude" that sounds like truth because it is structured as an eyewitness account filled with details of the phenomenal world (Campbell 1988, 126).

Regardless of when, where, or how the story begins, historical accounts are problematic if they use the same Eurocentric epistemological categories and teleological narratives that the global turn is trying to eliminate. Often the "global turn" in contemporary art reinforces Eurocentric hierarchies by showing work that favors artists trained in Euro-American art schools, as in the case of the international biennales mentioned earlier. However, as argued here, the entangled processes of globalization, capitalism, and colonialism are not unique attributes of nineteenth-century modernity, or even eighteenth- or seventeenth-century modernity. Geographical and period designations need to remain porous to avoid the very trap of Eurocentrism that a global context is intended to mitigate. Today, the objects produced in colonial settings during the first three centuries of intensive global interaction provide valuable resources for studying processes of linguistic and cultural mediation and the circulation of knowledge in the early modern world. Books such as Mexican

colonial manuscripts, and many other portable objects, operated like ships, writes art historian Daniela Bleichmar (2016): they were neither static nor stable signifiers, but textual, visual, and material mediators. Travel literature, topographical writings, catalogues of places, buildings, and things, missionary accounts, inventories, as well as collections of the rare, the beautiful, and the strange, have in recent years led to many new, creative strategies for studying the fluctuating early modern senses of “art.”

Current research efforts in early modern transcultural studies are concerned with recovering ways of making, seeing, and organizing embedded in objects, practices, and writings produced in what literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt famously called “contact zones,” that is, places of sustained, intensive cultural interaction in heterogeneous societies such as Viceregal Mexico (Pratt 1992). As subsequently theorized by cultural anthropologist James Clifford, museum collections are also potentially “contact zones” (Clifford 1997). An advantage of transcultural approaches is that they do not isolate objects artificially and retrospectively from the rest of the world, writes art historian Mia Mochizuki, but such relational approaches to art history will only become fully operational “when the analysis of every object assumes an architecture of systemic connectivity and relative agency on the cellular level” (Mochizuki 2018, 14).

How to Deal with Eurocentric Concepts of Art Past and Present

What are the implications for contemporary art of pushing back the emergence of the modern concepts of art and interest in the origins of society from the eighteenth century to the initial period of global capitalism driven by European initiatives? Only then does it become apparent that Eurocentric arguments advanced by Enlightenment philosophers in the eighteenth century are an effect of the “coloniality” of power and knowledge operating since the early sixteenth century. The definition of humanity that excludes most humans defined in terms of their *techné* and forms of social organization was driven by extractive capitalism since the beginning (Moore 2016). The secular distinction between civilized and primitive art initially emerged in Catholic Reformation writings that were disseminated around world throughout the colonial period through evangelization.

Amerindians were accused of lacking *techné* to make them fully human at the same time that they were performing highly skilled labor in the mines and forests for their colonial oppressors.¹⁸ Jason W. Moore, one of the leading voices in the discourse on environmentalism that has emerged over the past two decades, is highly critical of “the binary of Humanity and Nature ... inscribed in the intellectual DNA of the Anthropocene project” because it omits consideration of economic factors (Moore 2010, 2). Moore has studied the early modern expansion of the global economy, focusing on Potosí in the Viceroyalty of Peru, by far the largest producer of silver in the world in the sixteenth century. The place of American silver in the rise of global capitalism had been well-studied before Moore, but he is the first to articulate how the flow of silver was a world-ecological process (Moore 2010). The sudden influx of silver to Europe beginning in 1545 quickly inaugurated successive fiscal crises leading to the imperial restructuring of Peru within a decade. As the mining progressed, the quality of silver ore declined, and the cheaper technology of smelting used to maximize profit depended on burning large quantities of wood. Large amounts of old-growth timber were also needed to build the infrastructural support inside the mining tunnels.

The overuse of resources led to deforestation in the mountains, which led, in turn, to erosion, while raising of livestock necessary for large-scale mining multiplied out of proportion to resources. The deeper mines increased respiratory diseases. Local events had global trajectories and vice versa. Competition in the international silver market drove down wages, introduced round the clock shifts, all of which resulted in more Amerindian miners dying from overwork and disease and degraded environmental conditions.

Expanding applications of ancient authority for classifying humans developed alongside the extraction of raw materials and degradation of the environment in the Americas. The same structures of domination and dispossession played out in many other colonial settings all over the world. A decolonial perspective links both dehumanization (the social process) and human exceptionalism (its theoretical justification) directly to climate degradation as two entangled effects of the same capitalist drive to maximize profit and the same colonialist practice of extracting resources for use elsewhere. Like capital, colonialism is a structure of domination predicated on dispossession. From a decolonial perspective, instead of capitalist relations, what matters are processes of dispossession, land acquisition, and the removal of resources for someone else's benefit.

The ways in which colonialism, capitalism, and environmentalism have been entangled are not settled relationships (Liboiron 2021, viii). That is, links between the discourse on art and coloniality, which are complex and multiple, vary from case to case. I have only barely begun to scratch the surface in this chapter. The modern Western idea that art is primarily an expression, representation, embodiment, or sign of the intentions of its producer—variously referred to as the person or persons who materially fabricated the work, the product's sponsor, enabler, agent, promoter, or the system of artistic or cultural production itself—are all dependent upon this fundamental hypothesis: the accepting as natural, given, or in other words beyond discussion, of a certain concordance between what are distinguished as “cause and effect” (Preziosi and Farago 2012, 8).

Therein lies the enduring paradox of the dualistic distinction between a work of artistry and the forces or circumstances that are thought to have brought it into being, between any work and its cause. While those forces can be imagined to be prior to and ontologically independent of their effects, in practice their concordance is fragile and problematically circular. The idea of art, as something antecedent to a world of art objects as exemplifications of that idea, turns out to be a very complex and problematic notion. The same hierarchical “structuring structure” of civilized versus primitive, art versus artifact, the West versus the rest, takes numerous forms and has shaped many varieties of popular culture and general education.¹⁹

The categories and modes of thinking that have been the subject of discussion here are so widely diffused that it is often difficult to recognize their value-laden operations. A brilliant critique of Eurocentric assumptions embedded in Western representational practices is the ongoing work of the interdisciplinary visual artist Kent Monkman, who identifies as a Canadian First Nations artist of Cree ancestry. He practices decolonial strategies through provocative, playful but deadly serious interventions into Euro-American art history and the Western representational practices he embraces and remakes in his own image. In performances, paintings, films, and videos, Monkman demonstrates that positioning his subaltern identity as mobile and multiple is key to grounding knowledge. His gender-fluid alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle often appears in his work as a time-traveling, shape-shifting, supernatural being who reverses the colonial gaze to challenge received notions of history and indigenous peoples (Figure 9.2; Monkman 2012).

The responsibility of intellectuals to society has changed as awareness has grown that human-induced degradation of the ecosystem poses an imminent existential threat to life as we know it on planet Earth. Responsible behavior today entails a fundamental rethinking of the relationship of all humans to the rest of nature. Efforts to bring the social and the biological together in numerous fields are moving beyond the inherited dichotomy between nature and culture altogether. Once a marker distinguishing so-called savages from civilized peoples, those who hold to an ontology of animism now provide useful paradigms for questioning Western ontological divisions by producing narratives of identity that connect humans with the rest of the planet instead of positioning ourselves as detached observers or vehicles for the consumption of commodities and the exploitation of resources. The most fundamental takeaway is that the world cannot be reduced to a mere resource if subject and object are deeply interconnected (Haraway 1991, 201).²⁰



FIGURE 9.2 Kent Monkman, *Miss Chief: Justice of the Piece*, performance, Friday, 4 February 2012, Smithsonian's National Museum of The American Indian, Washington, D.C. Miss Chief Eagle Testickle holds court in a performance introducing her new inclusive nation, the Nation of Miss Chief, where she deconstructs issues of blood quantum, race, and tribal enrollment. Photo Katherine Fogden, NMAI. See performance documentation via Vtape: TAPECODE 672.11 at <https://www.kentmonkman.com>, accessed on 14 June 2022.

Notes

- 1 See now, Hicks (2020), including a provisional list of the hundreds of institutions that received and still hold Benin objects.
- 2 The exhibition that Belting cited was Susan Vogel's *Art/Artifact* at the Center for African Art in New York, 1988, which reconsidered the issues of William Rubin's *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984, widely criticized as an attempt to "exculpate the hegemonic appropriation of tribal artifacts by modern artists" (Belting 2013, 179).
- 3 Thanks to Bill Sherman for the latter reference.
- 4 Humboldt Forum website. Available at: <https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/programm/dauerangebot/exhibition/berlin-global-16471>, accessed on March 17, 2022.
- 5 See the excellent critique of these dangerous trends by Rampley (2017).
- 6 On April 22, 2022, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts announced that it, too, will return not only its Benin bronzes to Nigeria, but also Mali sculptures and a Dutch painting stolen from

- a Jewish Hungarian collector during WWII, while the Denver Museum returned four works to Cambodia in 2021.
- 7 The new (as of 2021) US Secretary of the Interior, Debra Haaland, who is an enrolled member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, has announced plans to streamline the bureaucracy: Department of the Interior Press Release, dated July 15, 2021. Available at: <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-tribal-and-native-hawaiian-consultations-discuss-updates>, accessed on May 10, 2023.
 - 8 My book in progress, provisionally entitled *Writing Borderless Histories of Art: Cultural Memory in the Era of Climate Degradation* (forthcoming, Routledge Press), will provide a fully documented history of the issues.
 - 9 More than any other writer, Jacob Burckhardt established the concept of the Renaissance as central to the discipline of art history. See Farago (1995, 3–6) for an overview of earlier critiques, including my own.
 - 10 On the difficulty of defining *politeia* and its relevance to environmentalism today, see Balibar (2015, especially 7–28).
 - 11 Legal discourses regarding the illegitimacy of enslaving Africans drew upon shared understandings of a just war, but the arguments depended on establishing their preexisting Christian status because Christians cannot justly enslave other Christians; see Ireton (2020). There is no indication that cases involving Black Africans were evaluated on the basis of their cultural achievements.
 - 12 Without endangering the claim that all rights were products of God’s laws, not God’s grace, as Protestant reformers argued. See Pagden (1990, 17–18).
 - 13 Reprinted along with shorter tracts in many other editions and translations, Las Casas’s *Brevisima relación* was re-published with illustrations by the Protestant publisher Theodor de Bry in 1598. See Davies (2016, 176–178, 219–227).
 - 14 Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Argumentum apologiae adversus Genesium Sepulvedam theologum cordubensem*, 1550, Bibliothèque Nationale Paris, Fonda Latins, MS 12929, fol. 24r–25r, as cited in Pagden (1982, 136).
 - 15 Paleotti 1582, in *Trattati* 1961, II: 419–452; and Paleotti (2012, 258–280), Book 2, chapters 36–42.
 - 16 Early modern literacy was made up of several skills, including reading, writing, interpreting texts, and gathering information from pictures. The impact of the vernacular press on early modern society is a mainstay of Reformation studies (citing Leitch 2010, 13). In the vast bibliography on print culture, the classic study of learned culture is Eisenstein (1979). For people of other social strata, see Chartier (1987). For a comparative study of then and now, see Darnton (2009). Ferguson (2003) introduces the concept of gendered literacies to argue that literacy is a “shifting and plural phenomenon” (3).
 - 17 A point well made by Maria Berbara, “‘They live one hundred and fifty years’: The trope of longevity and epidemic diseases across the early modern Atlantic,” presentation at the Getty Research Institute Scholars Program, 15 June 2022. Professor Berbara is preparing a book on the topic.
 - 18 On the contributions of indigenous knowledge to this technology, see Cañizares-Esguerra (2017).
 - 19 I lift the term “structuring structure” from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* to describe schemata that “generate and organize practices and representations ... without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” Bourdieu (1977, 72).
 - 20 In her response to the climate crisis, Haraway emphasizes the need to de-center “thinking practices” focused on humans to understand how collectives are “built with each other” as interacting “units” in the web of life that has been “worlded” by global capitalism since the sixteenth century, citing Haraway (2016, 37).

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PEDAGOGY

The Blank Canvas and Other Myths

Al-An deSouza

It seems fitting to be writing this while traveling in europe, after two years of pandemic-enforced immobility. I've been encountering art in airports and hotels, but mostly I haven't lingered or I've ignored it, whether rushing past or sharing waiting or sleeping spaces with it. This morning I left a seaside town, and a hotel room with a print on canvas of a lighthouse (emulating a painting of a lighthouse). In the print a fenced, solitary path leads to the closed white door of the lighthouse, which extends the length of the print, rising into cloudy sky. As antidote to its cocky overtures, I think of the expansive wandering of *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf's 1927 novel, and its reflections on art and poetry, on time passing, the place(s) of women in worlds that men think they have made, of comings, goings, and returns (including Woolf's own childhood seaside visits)—all of these against a backdrop of the everyday seepage of empire. The print quickly morphs, from drab decor, to curiosity, to intrusion. It reminds me that these non-spaces (hotels, airports) are, in an artistic, architectural, and sensory, affective sense, abstractions (though with different lived consequences). Their "style" is that of multinational, corporate blandness, whose rubrics are regulation, efficiency, and cost management. They feel designed to create and contain a conformity of experience. And yet, bodies are not the same, they respond differently, nor can they be fully managed.

Tomorrow, I leave this time zone at its 8 a.m. and arrive in my home time zone at its 8 p.m. The next day I will be back in the classroom, teaching a seminar on "Art Criticism for a Changing World." I ponder the relevance of my travels to the classroom and my course. How can art pedagogy, drawing upon history, theory, and criticism, account for the world as it is and make space for life experiences that are impending, immediate, and accumulated over generations? Mobility, stasis, transience, pandemics, refugees, and war; our connections to, and separations and protections from, them—the realities of the world—and to what extent they intrude or don't into whatever bubble we might construct as *our* world. In what ways might we counter-map our stasis and our mobility, as well as map the spaces of our encounters? Hotels and airports—borders themselves—with their check-ins, customs checks, and passport controls (and, from 2020 to 2022, COVID requirements), are immediate examples of disciplinary regulation, designed to allow through some bodies, and keep out other, non-conforming bodies, however conformity is regulated within each of those spaces.

Like all my travels, even those for pleasure, this trip psychologically reprints my histories of migration, imprinting colonization's varying controls over mobility, from the unencumbered extraction of raw materials to the surveillance and containment of colonized populations.¹ Achille Mbembe refers to colonization as "a technology for regulating migratory movements" (Mbembe 2019, 10). How do we shift the classroom and studio away from those regulatory functions, and toward mapping the effects and affect of transitory bodies, to increase their artistic, cultural, intellectual, physical, social, and political mobility choices, and without adding to their surveillance nor creating databases for further disciplinary actions?

Divesting Modernism from Colonialism

By modernism, I mean the dominant artistic production and discourse following the eighteenth-century enlightenment rationalization of civic ideas, and the aesthetic foundation of humanist art practice during the roughly one hundred years between the 1860s and 1960s—the same period as the consolidation of european colonial power and subsequent decolonization.²

In the present neoliberal, capitalist aftermaths of colonizing expansions, how can art pedagogy reconceptualize european modernism as colonialism's culture, and toward the long view of how to more expansively and equitably teach the histories, futures, values, and possibilities of art?³ To divest art pedagogy from a colonizing, extractive modernism necessarily draws upon a number of overlapping theoretical models, including postcolonial, diaspora, migration, and disidentification studies, feminisms, queer theory, disability studies, and posthumanism.

Modernism, like enlightenment humanism, like the "white man's burden," functioned much like a lighthouse, casting its benevolent beam across the "primitive" darkness of the world.⁴ The ideology of that image was globally imposed to become deeply entrenched.⁵ If modernism is the not-so-soft power of cultural pacification, its unabridged story needs to be told by those it set out to "pacify" and "enlighten." The story requires an active, complex unlinking, similar to the process of disidentification, which José Muñoz Esteban describes as decoding "any cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy" (Esteban 1999). I deploy disidentification along with the Indigenous envisaging of repatriation, whereby land is repurposed as part of a future-making process, rather than the transfer of ownership between patriarchal nationalisms that the term repatriation suggests.⁶ While possibilities of repatriation have indeed gained some momentum within institutions, my proposals here refer less to ideas of return such as of plundered material culture and more to rethinking and remaking how knowledge and material cultures are reproduced and newly made in the pedagogical and display spaces of centers of economic, cultural, artistic, and intellectual acquisition and power. The task is to remake these sites, their knowledges, and practices from extractive models and toward "unsettlement" and redistribution, while examining how those who have been historically excluded may enter and reclaim them on more equitable terms.

Rematriating the material and knowledge cultures of modernism through pedagogy requires examining them as "acquisitions" from that which is deemed other, elsewhere, and elsewhen. It also requires the recognition that modernism's assemblage has been (and continues to be) in service to white dominance.⁷ The conversion of the "raw" material of global cultures into narratives of european genius and progress is, I venture, a form of (re)racialization into european identities.⁸ Teaching histories of elsewheres/whens must account *for* and *to* their living historians who are here/now. We can no longer teach the art of, say, Polynesia, through the mediation of the work by an artist such as Paul Gauguin, nor as though it is only an art of the past whose practitioners are not themselves potentially within

the classroom (as teachers and students). We can look instead to artists such as Yuki Kihara, from Samoa's Fa'afafine community, who researches historical archives to "upcycle" Gauguin's paintings into photographs that shift authorship, asking who speaks, who is spoken for, and what is spoken. In *Paul Gauguin with a Hat (After Gauguin)*, 2020, Kihara dons racial and gender drag to depict herself in the guise of Gauguin, modeled after his *Self-Portrait with a Hat*, 1893–1894. While Gauguin's portrait leans slightly forward, Kihara's leans slightly back, and turned aside as though just slapped with white gloves, that old "gentlemen's" challenge to a duel.

Identifying the "canon" as a cult(ure) and narrative of white suprematism and as a deliberately exclusive mode of privileging certain kinds of art (yet one that deploys narratives of universalism) requires remaking arts' histories within and beyond the classroom.⁹ And like its military correlative, the cannon, we need to resist the canon as a constraining, coercive, compulsory, correctional force. I have in mind Judith Butler's examination of the reiterative, compulsory nature of gender and heterosexuality. Butler's scrutiny of gender can aid rethinking euro-american art history and practices not as a center or origin but as "an incessant and *panicked* imitation of its own naturalized idealization" (Butler 1993). Butler and other feminist critiques of patriarchal culture productively overlap with Edward Said's understanding of orientalist discourse constructing a "feminine" and antithetical "Middle East" to ultimately serve europe's own "masculine" self-image as one that is "civilized" and superior in all ways (see e.g. Pollock 1999). It's a self-image that requires the incessant mobilization of material, cultural knowledge, and corporeal capital, infusions that are already commodified precisely because of their function to salvage an otherwise unsustainable dominance.

The last chapter of my 2018 book, *How Art Can Be Thought*, focused on Mark Rothko as a civilizational standard, and a paradigm for rematriation (deSouza 2018). A conventional pedagogy of art history's culture pyramid—with Rothko as apex—trawls the visual culture histories of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and later Italian city states, through to Holland, Germany, France, and on to New York, with variously acknowledged orientalist and primitivist extractions from (former) colonies and occupied territories (East, South, and West Asia, the many regions of Oceania and Africa, Indigenous Americas, and so on). The point of the rematriation of such knowledges in the classroom is not then to parse out each one and trace it to its actual or imagined origins but to dethrone the white, heterosexual cis-male figure from being the avatar of the human, the conduit of/for all knowledge and artistic "innovation," and to conceive a posthuman collectivity that offers no single model to define humanity and culture, nor erects and polices boundaries of what constitutes the human.

Rematriation requires that art pedagogy do more than just broaden its perspective to multiple points and intersecting trajectories. It requires examining—including through the mediums and disciplines of art practices—the ideological underpinnings of euro-american modernism. It isn't simply a matter of adding different artists from "other" locations or histories to our teaching. We must seek to undo and perhaps replace modernist foundations, continuities, and aftermaths—including the very concept of the human as it is developed in european enlightenment thought. The problem with this concept is less with the ideals of celebration, connection, and achievement found in some versions of liberal humanism, and more with the narrowness of the conception of "human" as rooted in whiteness, heteronormativity, and masculinity, resulting in the domination over, extraction from, and erasure of all that and those who deviate from that trinity. Such narrow understandings and practices of the human leave little scope for a collective "we." Yet, inculcating a collective "we" is a primary ambition of pedagogy. It needs to be a "we" based less on a simplistic rhetoric of inclusion (with its inevitable boundaries of exclusion), and more a "we" that is embedded within relations of difference without ascribing hierarchies of value, and while rejecting and building beyond current (capitalist) hierarchies of representation, visibility, and access.¹⁰

The point is not to argue in the classroom for (or not only for) remapping europe and its (former) colonies as comprised of hybrid, mestizo (mixed-race) cultures. Concepts of *mes-tizaje*, *metisage*, *creolization*, *hapa*, or *mongrelization* *can* shift cultural claims of what is “european.”¹¹ These claims can link to Indigenous de-territorializing assertions of “we are still here,” or to the migrant’s reterritorializing response, “we are here because you were there,” further rooting “european” cultures in occupation and its aftermaths. But these terms and models of hybridity fail to sufficiently identify and resist hierarchies of cultural capital founded on mythologies of race and Indigeneity, and in practice can serve to further empower elite cadres as imagining themselves to be already hybrid (I’m thinking here of how Central and South American national discourses of mestizo cultures can elide questions of racial and social hierarchy). Race here is referred to as it relates to discourses of power relations, not as it supposedly secures identity.

Beyond models of hybridity (especially those that claim sameness in difference), we need to consider the rematriation of knowledge cultures from errant perspectives. “Errancy” provokes meanings of being wrong, of being vagrant and outcast, of being untracked, and considers how these terms may be applied to ways of knowing that cut through disciplinary regimes that prioritize supposedly rational discourse. Errancy unlinks from patrilineal geographic locations and is reconceived as intersecting political positionings and alliances, mobile and temporary shared homes on/from the grounds of wherever we may be (including airports and hotel rooms). For example, we need to examine how, in narratives of art history as in the art classroom, languages that are varyingly legible and coded within canonical (re)presentations are used to speak to and for errant bodies that are unseen and simultaneously surveilled, including whether/how those languages enable or restrict agency. By (re)presentation, I mean any form of imaging and imagining, including languages of abstraction.¹²

Within this we need consider (re)presentation as both language and territory, and as historicized, communicative terrains. Such considerations can help rethink beyond conventional binaries through which art is typically thought, for example, between representation and abstraction. Rather than, for example, modernist conventions of abstraction as solely resulting from formal pursuits or from expressive aesthetics—both of which prioritize a detached, individual “sensitivity” (genius) and formal innovation—how might languages of abstraction be reconsidered as haptic and haunted territory linked to social and collective (dis)embodiment? I use (dis)embodiment to speak toward a dialectics of haunting and presence—to foreground those who have been erased, excluded, or otherwise displaced from histories of representation; I deploy haunting not as a loss set in or returning from the past but in the sense of a historically, materially, and corporeally resistant presence that refuses to disappear. Haunting is (a) presence. The task in the classroom is to connect the terrain of representation, materiality/immateriality, and immanence/presence as that which refuses, encodes, or at least defers. Who and what is it that won’t go away (or “back to where it came from”), that won’t be made to disappear, yet which insists on its right to opacity and refuses legibility, transparency, and surveillance? What are the errant paths along which it/they/we return and remain, and how do we extend those paths of refusal to future possibilities and conditions of remaking?

Haunting includes the yet unmade, the regional modernisms, artists, and artworks that never came into being due to the unmaking of those regions through colonialism and their remaking through the dominating ideologies of colonial bureaucracies. Without advocating returns to pre-colonial fantasies—which have mainly been acted upon by conservative and authoritarian nationalist movements—we can think of the yet unmade as present forces that hold possibilities for imagining futures based upon relations of equity, and against dominance by any one group. Without policing what artistic imagination may lead to, we might still insist that functions of art are to critique some worlds and image other worlds, and to produce movements away from or desire toward those worlds.

While this might call forth ideas of transcendence, with its religious suggestions of “after-lives,” we should move instead to the question: How might we approach art works as immanent, as already animate matter?¹³ The term “animate” is not to imply an opposition to the separate category of inanimate; matter occupies space and exists in time, and is therefore spatially and temporally related to other matter, whether or not it is “animated” (also see Chuh and deSouza 2022).¹⁴ Matter might also be invested with memory and other haptic associations to/from animate beings. Such investments cross temporal lines, as well as boundaries between bodies, between human and non-human, and between matter and the immaterial. Encounters with artwork, then, whether material or virtual, occur within and through networks of relationships, material, immaterial, social, historical, and so on that function across temporal boundaries of pasts, presents, and futures of the work and of the viewer.

While we can approach teaching and viewing art as encounters, there are some caveats: contrary to popular ideas of “fresh eyes” and “cold readings” that are sometimes encouraged in art critiques, we are already ideological beings and are therefore not blank slates. The practice of viewing an artwork is not only to understand what *it* means but to use our encounter with it to examine how *we* have already been brought into meaning and ideology as viewing subjects. Artworks’ capacities to constitute worlds intersect with viewers since artworks are dependent on meanings ascribed to and generated by materials, formal languages, gestures, technologies, and so on—through their histories and within their present and presence—any worldview is embedded in and generated by those capacities through which the artwork exists and functions. It’s not the artwork by itself but how it is brought into meaning by its viewers plus their discourses that constitute worlds.

In the case of modernism, the constituted worlds extract, ingest, incorporate, and re-embody colonized cultures and bodies, and simultaneously gloss over or erase the material, bodily, and psychological cost to the colonized of having been cannibalized. Modernism as representational language echoes the ideologies and violence of colonialism, becoming a haunted form, a forked tongue, a doppelganger—in its literal translation of “double walker.” If colonization, and neoliberal late capitalism in its wake, are the global brain, modernism and its continuities are the walking dead.

The critical celebration of Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) can help illustrate my points. Klint’s abstract paintings gained US visibility through a 2018 survey at the Guggenheim Museum, New York.¹⁵ Reviews of the show celebrated Klint as a “new” discovery, as an almost “outsider” artist upending the conventions of art history, and described her work in terms of feminist jouissance and the “rapturous overture” of sensory overload (Smith 2018). In the rush of feminist reclamation, critics speak of the work as necessary inclusion, of an “us” and “we” that purports to be universal.¹⁶ However, this inclusion follows the pattern of reception for other modernist work by appropriating and simultaneously excluding those who were colonized at the time of the work’s making and their descendants in the present (a different “us” to which I lay claim). The universal “us” instead describes a transcendence of time and culture that is a central hallmark of whiteness. Within the logic of eurocentric values, it is the white, unmarked subject who can move across all cultural barriers, much like a universally passported traveler who breezes through all checkpoints and who is emblematic of economic, military, and hegemonic power.

Without diminishing Klint’s extraordinary achievements, and the necessary feminist rewriting of arts’ histories, it is equally necessary to historicize her work in relation to more expansive global and colonial intersections across difference and power differentials. Klint’s own self-framing, which art discourse subsequently repeats, asserts that her work was channeled through a spirit guide. While Klint began attending seances in 1879, and by the 1890s was holding her own seances with other artists, this was the exact period of what we may call high colonialism and the birthing of modernism, at least according to art historical convention.

Klint was a devotee of Theosophy and, later, Anthroposophy, as were Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian—two of the supposed “fathers” of modernist abstraction. Theosophy was itself a euro-americanization of Buddhist, Tantric, and Hindu philosophies and visual vocabularies. Founded in New York in 1875, Theosophy’s core beliefs were written by Helena Blavatsky, who claimed her sources were “Masters” or “Mahatmas” based in Tibet.¹⁷ Tracing those lineages, how might we read Klint (and Kandinsky and Mondrian) if we consider that her seances were channeling the “orientalization” of colonized cultures and the ghosts of their peoples denied self-representation? If we consider Klint’s work in Jungian terms, we might ask: What is the collective unconscious that she is mining? Art criticism needs to perform, in Frantz Fanon’s terms, a collective *catharsis*, to heal a collective “us” from the trauma of colonially enforced and globalized collective unconsciousness. Modernism’s fascination with the “spiritual,” and of “worlds beyond,” which formed much of european abstraction’s rhetoric, is—I propose—the haunting of european culture by its metropolitan hinterlands, its “beyonds” of colonial occupation and regulation: the returns of the *oppressed*, as it were.¹⁸

Modernism and its trajectory toward abstraction as the removal of the body and the abdicated representation of its own locations and deployments of power—or the elision of the global body politic—can be reconceived as haunting, as refusal by the colonized to be completely erased, including from their own histories. Abstraction then, is understood as invaded, newly occupied, and always haunted corporeal territory. Counter to the foundational colonialist conspiracy theories of “empty land” or “terra nullius,” there is no blank canvas. Similarly, there is no beginning and certainly no “first” for modernism, no founding fathers (or mothers). The spaces through which modernism becomes visible to itself—as “discoveries” and “inventions”—are already occupied. To keep pace, our teaching needs to rethink modernism entirely.

Posthuman Frameworks

Within the humanities, at a time of declining funding, low enrollment, and a perception that humanities degrees have limited career prospects, typical justifications for the human(ities) refer to its Greco-Roman, Reformation, and enlightenment philosophical and ethical lineages (though profoundly compromised by their accommodation of slavery and colonialism), the humanities as representative of unfettered inquiry, and of liberal, democratic values that exemplify the human aspiration to freedom and truth. One may expect the humanities and the arts, as liberal as they supposedly are, to be at the forefront of imagining equitable structures and practices. On the other hand, and in keeping with their imperial origins, humanities institutions have long provided comfortable homes for systemic racism, gender discrimination, sexual violence, and the privileging of pre-selected, societally enabled bodies. Bluntly put, the humanities and arts—despite their rhetoric of universalism and equality—encourage *hierarchies* of the “human” and gatekeep access to the “artistic,” including through their default excuses of beauty, truth, and excellence.

Relevant to art and its pedagogies, Kandice Chuh coins the term “illiberal humanism” and states that:

the centrality of the aesthetic [within liberal humanism] keys us into the ways that this reigning humanism sorts people into the fit and unfit, the rational and the unreasonable, Man and other, Man and woman, and Human and racialized subject. In this project, aesthetics refers to the relationships among the senses and the processes and structures of value making by which certain sensibilities become common sense and others are disavowed, subjugated, or otherwise obscured (Chuh 2019, xii).

Chuh asserts aesthetics as “integral to the production of particular kinds of difference—for example, that of the racial and colonial order, that of sex-gender regulation—as part of the naturalized visceral experience of the world” (Chuh 2019, xii).

Lest we remain locked into the commodification and fetishization of hierarchical difference, as Chuh suggests, we need to rethink, re-embody, and remake aesthetics from the variously unhuman (by which I mean both those barred from “entry” to and those removed from the family of the human) categories of the unfit, the unreasonable, the disavowed, subjugated, and otherwise obscured (within art schools and departments, we might well be describing BIPOC and LGBTQI+ faculty and students). The point is not to keep producing difference with a hope that it eventually gains access and legitimacy through its demand for “visibility” (we’re a long way still from equity). Rather, we need to reject the inhuman categorizing of “unhuman” by undoing the core category of the “human,” and to conceptualize and practice other forms of relation. With euro-american modernism modeling the category of the “human” and the “Great Chain of Being (*scala naturae*),” how might an as-yet undefined “we” unlink from the chain’s varying hierarchies and exclusions?¹⁹ Conversely, why insist on one’s humanity according to a scale that excludes by design? We need instead to consider new alliances within the posthuman, or what Rosi Braidotti refers to as the “posthuman convergence,” as a gathering toward and expansion from *zoe* (“the life of all living things”), *bios* (“the life of humans organized in society”), and technology (Braidotti 2022, 314). This is not to abandon demands for the recognition of one’s humanity and the rights assigned to that category (even as it remains a heavily contested category) but to consider that the category itself was never and is certainly no longer useful nor safe for the continuity of the rest of the planet.

We might demand the equitable application of rights and values to living beings and *still* unlink from the ideologies of humanism. The posthumanism I’m referring to is a move away from the long history, ideology, and politics of humanism and the “human” as it is conceived by its representation in and through property-owning, heteronormative, enabled-bodied, white dominant, cis-masculinities. In specifying the incarnations of these values, I am referring to ideologies drawing upon, prescribing, coercing, and enforcing subjectivities, rather than to actual, already designated, or becoming subjects. This distinction is crucial, since these values and the ability to work across difference have considerable pedagogical impact within the classroom or studio on all students, whatever their identifications. I am not advocating that students disengage from the work of white, male, heterosexual, normatively bodied artists, whether within art history or as practiced by their peers within the classroom/studio.²⁰ Those students who are societally privileged have as much (or more) obligation to address these questions, and through their own experience, rather than assuming they can only understand (or empathize) through the experiences of those who have been excluded or dis-abled.

We need to end the public subsidizing of outmoded markers of “civilization” and their paradigms of human achievement, as measured by the usual parade of modernist artists (Van Gogh, Gauguin, Picasso, etc.) and their heirs (Pollock, Koons, Hirst, etc.). Decentering these from core curricula, from funded institutions, from scholarship, from private sponsorship and mass advertising by special interest groups (including corporations, collectors, dealers, and museum trustees) can provide more expansive ways to engage with the intersecting fields of culture. To turn away from europe, while reading *through* it, is to undo, provincialize, and decenter it from being a source, and return it to the status of a waystation or a hotel room whose artworks might simultaneously be decor, curiosity, and intrusion. We can expand Kihara’s example of upcycling modernism to how a more global range of artists are creating not just new artworks but alternate *values* from modernism’s discarded material. As these works build their own histories, we might perhaps see an organic replacement of modernism within pedagogy and museums.

As critical language develops in response to a broader cartography of artists and artworks, we need to (quickly) oust the typical conception of difference as lack or deviation from a normative standard. The difference I'm suggesting needs to be mobilized is, in contrast, conceived as dynamic, relational, and linked to errant processes of becoming, including intersectional, mutual processes of becoming oneself.²¹ This is not equivalent to the humanist emphasis on self-fashioning as the ability, conferred by social status and power, to cultivate the self as a subject popularly understood as the "self-made man." Such cultivation involves the separation/distancing from all those who, the argument goes, cannot or do not cultivate themselves, including those categorized as "other" by class, race, gender, ability, sexuality, or species. Rather than examining how systems actively restrict them, these "others" are assumed to be responsible for their own lack of cultivation and "success." Reconceiving difference is beset by conflict, competing claims and interests, by the policing of ideas and voices, and by opposition from systems already in place to maintain pre-existing conditions. "Becoming oneself," then, is dependent on our relational, errant abilities to mutually navigate collision and conflict (Figure 10.1).

In order to situate these ideas as one might do in a classroom, here I briefly discuss a series of paintings and prints by Bay Area artist Dewey Crumpler, which reinstates the creative agency from Chuh's categories of the previously "disavowed, subjugated, or otherwise obscured," and speaks to my concerns.²² Crumpler's *Hoodie* series, ongoing since 1993 and a remarkable accumulation of over one hundred-and-counting works, renders (dis)embodied experiences that complexly articulate located encounters with modernism. The *hoodies* are corporeal, but seemingly spectral, free-floating forms of the ubiquitous clothing item, whose name refers to the head-covering hood and, in its vernacular inference of "from the hood" (as in, "from the neighborhood"), is stereotypically linked to a class-identifying assertion of Black masculinity. Within each greenish hood is a black space that is both presence and void, sometimes forming question or exclamation marks, other times a painterly



FIGURE 10.1 Dewey Crumpler, *Re-making Aesthetics Through Dis/Embodiment*, 1999, acrylic and collage on canvas (12 × 12 inches). Courtesy of the artist and Cushion Works, San Francisco.

swish—though one more akin to oil or tar (there is much leakage and spillage in these works). Sometimes the black space—both micro and macro—is that of the cosmos, complete with galaxies and star charts. Crumpler’s *Hoodie* works might conventionally be thought to be peripheral to mainstream (read white dominant) contemporary art, but they are more accurately understood as *beyond* and occasionally *above* modernism’s centering of whiteness. Time and dimension travelers, they cross-inhabit postcolonial and Afrofuturist notions of fluid temporality (liberation through re-visioned pasts, reparative presents, and alternate futures), in some paintings charting sneaker-shaped starships, in others visiting the (October 2019) remodeling of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

From that Afrofuturist stance of posthumanism, the hoodies are acute observers of modernism, treating works by the likes of Monet, Picasso, Matisse, and Duchamp to anthropological scrutiny as well as to deep suspicion, even cultural disdain. In *Time Agent*, 1994, for example, a hoodie hovers, insectoid or chopper like, above Alfred Barr’s (in)famous 1936 exhibition catalogue charting abstract art, while in the background the word “modernism” is smeared, as though with fecal matter (Barr 1936). In *Cube-ing*, 1999, the hoodies body-snatch or perhaps snatch back the “demoiselles” of Picasso’s 1907 painting, turning it into a dance-off or a drag event. Clearly, it is Picasso who is being “dragged.” Each hoodie, hovering “head height” off the ground, casts a shadow in the form of a slave collar, so that the yoke of history is shown to be inescapable, sometimes marking the ground itself, as, for example, when the shadow forms merge with the floor patterning in the galleries of New York’s MoMA, becoming the literal ground for modernist history. A reversal occurs: the hoodies become ethnographers of the alien. It is modernism—with its drips and blobs, its dysenteric stains and slaving amoebae—that is portrayed as the invasive culture.²³

Crumpler’s 2020 *20th Century Fountain* (Figure 10.2) depicts a hoodie visitor to MoMA, standing before three “fountains,” the central one being Duchamp’s readymade urinal, *Fountain*, 1917, flanked on each side by what appear to be drinking fountains, which would have been segregated under the US Southern states’ twentieth-century regime of anti-Black Jim Crow laws (and here indicated by respective “skin” tones). What “fountain” means depends on who is looking and what histories are brought to bear upon it. Behind the fountains are a Mondrian and a Matisse, the Matisse echoed by the reproduction on the cover of what appears to be a MoMA catalogue tucked under the hoodie’s arm. On the left,



FIGURE 10.2 Dewey Crumpler, *20th Century Fountain*, 2020, acrylic and collage on canvas (20 × 24 inches). Courtesy of the artist and Cushion Works, San Francisco.

partially revealed in another gallery, is Thomas Cole's *Destruction*, 1836, from his suite of five paintings titled *The Course of Empire*. Cole's paintings narrate the course of a Greco-Roman-styled American "civilization" and in particular the rise and fall of empire. *Destruction*, the fourth painting, depicts the fury and carnage of war (with its multi-panel depictions of brothers fighting, the series suggests that this is a civil war), but the series as a whole is a fable for the clash of traditionalism and modernism, a certain nineteenth-century ideal of pastoral humanism and the greed of industrialized empire. Crumpler's pictorial location of the Cole painting situates it as the backdrop to Mondrian and Matisse as high priests of modernism, who are in turn the backdrop to the pillars of fountains, which in turn are the entryway/barrier to the hoodie as Black viewer. It should be mentioned again that the carpeted ground of the galleries is patterned by the form of the slave collar—the hoodie being racialized as different and subjected to *by* its high modernist surroundings and the histories embedded therein. It hardly needs clarifying, but Crumpler makes evident that the pathways for the contemporary art viewer (remember the modernist catalogue cover under the hoodie's arm) lie in traversing through these minefields, whether or not the viewer is aware of them.

The hoodies cannot (yet) be fully articulated, nor fully embodied, at least not through disciplinary, inherited, or existing languages. Crumpler centers transient and translucent bodies as disidentifying through/with modernism and its categories of race, and as those bodies that cannot be spoken for/by those categories. In that very excess of being unspoken (for), such bodies are by convention constructed as monstrous; their exceeding of categories of the human is the very aspect—monstrosity—that threatens and destabilizes the human. Like the specter of Blackness that haunts and shadow-doubles (white) modernism and other aspects of culture, the monstrous *extra-* is that which Crumpler calls forth in terms of excess of bodily integrity. The other meaning of *extra-* is "from beyond," the foreign body as alien infiltrator from beyond the pale (with all its historical references of occupation and restricted settlement).²⁴ The *extra-* body as therefore doubly threatening. In their arms-crossed expressive posturing, the hoodies become flamboyantly excessive (even as such a body might be shrouded and corporeally spectral), as spectacle or as secretly infiltrating—both threatening the bodily and psychological integrity of normative humanity.²⁵

But here, in the all-too-human familiarity of their body postures (based on Crumpler's close observation of his then-teenage sons), the hoodies become the figures through which European culture is gauged.²⁶ As ungrounded, indeterminate figures, the hoodies negotiate space and investigate the (im)possibilities of creating place. The distinction I'm making between space and place is that the latter is articulated as and identified through a spatial relationship with the body negotiating its own movement and transversality. The prehensile garment of the hoodie body is the critiquing, sentient organism, sleeves acting as feelers, as it were, toward the ground, walls, the air, to how the space has been racialized and gendered through the process of modernization. They map the space of each encounter, less through an individual claim and more by inhabiting it as a collective discourse. More than locating sites of hoodie encounter, these works are forms of emplacement, claiming discursive space and suggesting an incursion, a sense of both disrupted and claimed space, and defying the histories and currencies of being put or kept "in one's place."²⁷ The hoodies choreograph their own spaces of crossing, of coming into being, producing traversed maps-in-the-making for viewers.

Crumpler's work provides rich opportunities for rethinking how art can be taught through lineages that directly confront the seemingly inescapable dominance of euro-american modernism and decenter it through forceful critique, intersecting relationalities, divergent trajectories, and newly emerging collectivities. This is not to mention the fact that the hoodies exact exuberant glee from these tasks. It's a lesson well learned. Learning and teaching modernism might be painful—in the sense of teaching one's own erasure—but they can also provide unbridled pleasures of alternative forms of becoming.

Returns

I write this amid cyborgian jetlag, my body feeling like it is simultaneously living different time zones, experiencing hunger, digestion, wakefulness, and sleep at times inconsistent with where I am. I feel shadowed in deeply corporeal ways by the places and times left behind. To depict or map my body now requires plurality, as oscillation across/between shifting grounds; skin and feelers attuned both outwards and within; cradling memories long past, those taking shape, and those yet to form; the spaces and objects around me, familiar and changed in as-yet unknown ways while I was elsewhere/when; returning to (touching, smelling, and breathing in) the dust of my previous self that continued to dwell within my supposedly emptied home space; a bodily “relinking” to this present, its locations and its peoples, while holding onto those “left behind” (I look often at my memory aids, the ones many of us maintain: photographs, diaristic notes, artworks, “souvenirs”). These—the leavings and returns, the places left and rejoined; the body not fully here/now; the body dis- and re-assembling; the memory aids—are all the hauntings of lives being lived, and ones from/through which languages and artworks arise, and from/through which we speak with the world.

I’m suggesting these deeply embodied encounters—traversals, departures, and arrivals, negotiating boundary markers and checkpoints, assembling and disassembling—as models for teaching, experiencing, and learning about art. Artists such as Kihara and Crumpler bring into representation and back into presence the spirit guides, the displaced, the removed, all those who despite the attempted erasures remain at the core of modernism. We can only teach modernism through these fuller, more populated ways.

Notes

- 1 Though my family tracks its histories and namings through a double legacy of Portuguese and British colonies, I am acutely aware that my travel experiences are at one side of a spectrum of discomfort and bodily regulation, while on the other side are the extreme duress of forced migration (whether for political, economic, climate, or other survival reasons) and the “discarded” populations that capitalism and nations have deemed of no use except as political warnings to and boundary markers of (in)tolerance for their own citizens.
- 2 This is a conventionally accepted timeline; we can, however, trace colonial consolidation to at least the fifteenth-century expansions following Cristobal Colon’s acquisitive voyages west and Vasco da Gama’s east.
- 3 While I recognize that there are many modernisms that arise in different regions and under differing circumstances, my continuing use of “modernism” will refer specifically to european and euro-american modernisms. My lowercase use of european and american serves multiple functions: to refuse their authority and dominance; to indicate that their recognition of more globally inclusive sources, forms, and practitioners are ongoing; that as clusters in-the-making they await renaming.
- 4 See Rudyard Kipling’s poem, “The White Man’s Burden”:

...

*Take up the White Man’s burden—
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:—“Why brought ye us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?*

- 5 For example, the paradigmatic enlightenment motto of the university where I teach, UC Berkeley, is *Fiat Lux* (Let There Be Light).

- 6 See, for example, Sogorea Te' Land Trust, Oakland, CA. Available at: <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/rematriate-the-land-fund>.
- 7 I use "assemblage" to point towards modernism as cultural accretion, and to suggest pedagogical possibilities of dis- and re-assembly.
- 8 Or "whitewashing," to use a current term.
- 9 I've coined the term white suprematism as an amalgam of white supremacism and the art movement of suprematism. See deSouza (2018, 226).
- 10 See deSouza (2018), in which I expand on collectivity as a method of critique, and critique as training for democratic practices.
- 11 I'm using—in order—the colonial era and reclaimed Spanish, French, Caribbean, Hawaiian, and Black British terms.
- 12 A painting, for example, may depict something recognizable so that we can say that it looks like a person, or it is a painting of a person. But before its ability to represent something else, it is first a painting, that is, pigment upon a surface, an assembly of materials that through assemblage becomes a thing in itself: a painting. It looks like a person, but we know it isn't a person. That ability to "look like" something else, is also what I want to bring within the discussion of abstraction and haunting, since that mimetic ability is a set of stylistic and technical conventions understood by both the artist and the viewer.
- 13 In keeping with theories of new materialism emphasizing the agency of matter and crossing distinctions between the "natural" and the social, I suggest "animate" rather than "living," since I'm not making a distinction here between "living" and "dead," moving and "still."
- 14 "*animéte(d)*: Antonym for life; aliveness, applicable specifically to Asia/n: alien; robotic; machinic; cyborgian; artificially intelligent; doll-like; cartoonish; monstrous; grotesque" (Chuh and deSouza 2022).
- 15 *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*, Guggenheim Museum, October 12, 2018–April 23, 2019. Organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, with the cooperation of the Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm.
- 16 Smith ends her review in *The New York Times* with, "af Klint's achievement alters the past, it belongs to *us*" (my emphasis). Iris Müller-Westermann, curator at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, is cited by Natalia Rachlin (2013) as describing Klint thus: "This was really an artist who dared to think beyond her time, to step out of what was commonly accepted. She had visions about bigger contexts where it was not about making money or being very famous, but about doing something much more humble: trying to understand the world and who *we* are in it" (my emphasis).
- 17 See, for example, The Theosophical Society's own description of its origins, available at: <https://www.theosophical.org/about/theosophy>.
- 18 My reference is to Freud's theories of repression. Consider, for example, "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (Freud 1915b/1994, 147).
- 19 The Great Scale of Being refers to various hierarchical classificatory systems, originating with Aristotle and Plato.
- 20 I am not suggesting that, as has happened in my recent teaching experience, BIPOC students be encouraged or allowed to refuse to critique the work of white male students. But I do situate this refusal within the much longer history, which I have also experienced directly, of white students enforcing their critical boundaries by declaring their "cultural inability" to discuss the work of BIPOC students.
- 21 I use the plural neopronoun to move away from individualism and to advocate for subjectivities as multiple, fluid, and relational. See deSouza (2022).
- 22 There are now, belatedly, many artists within established art networks I might have chosen, but Crumpler's work, and this particular series, is one of the most explicit practices in its critical engagement with modernism.
- 23 I'm referencing Bataille's theory of the *informe*. See Bataille (1929, 1985).

- 24 The Pale historically refers to the fourteenth century Pale of Dublin, and the Pale of Calais, areas of British occupation, as well as the 1791 Pale of Settlement, the formation of areas of containment (ghettos) for Jews within Russia.
- 25 I'm also thinking of that other specter that is perceived as infiltrating and undermining european civic life and civility, the veiled Muslim female body, and its defiance of being fully surveilled.
- 26 Dewey Crumpler, in conversation with Sampada Aranke and Jordan Stein, Cushion Works Gallery, San Francisco, CA, November 5, 2021.
- 27 One might also recall Rep. Maxine Waters's repeated insistence of "Reclaiming my time," in response to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's evasive answers during testimonies to the House Financial Services Committee, July 27, 2017. See, for example, CNN, available at: <https://www.cnn.com/videos/cnnmoney/2017/07/27/mnuchin-testimony.cnn>.

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CRAFT

Craft and the Making of “Global” Contemporary Art

Pamela N. Corey

The terms craft, decorative arts, and folk art designate constructs that were once (and arguably, in some instances, continue to be) downplayed in descriptions of artistic practices due to the perception that such references could undermine the critical and market reception of a modernist or contemporary artist's work. The discursive cleaving of “art” and “craft” that supported the ideological formation of artistic modernism is notoriously associated with, for example, the history of abstract expressionism and the writings of critic Clement Greenberg. His argument for modernist art's philosophical interiority, transcendentalism, and medium specificity relied on a purging of all associations with “low” culture, be it mass, popular, or vernacular (Greenberg 1982, 1986). In this formulation, craft's association with the low rather than the high (a peculiar hierarchical distinction for many, if not the majority, of the world's cultures) thus distanced it from art's forward evolution. These developments are well-known within prevailing histories of modern art, which has long situated Western Europe and North America as the theater of modernism, and the accomplishments of white male artists as universally exemplary. But I will outline what is necessarily a longer and broader span of history that brings craft into the discourse of contemporary art's desire for globalism, while examining specificities of practice that are brought into focus through localized contexts and formal scrutiny. An abbreviated historical sketch will situate craft within transnational and transcultural histories, emphasizing the ways in which the art versus craft dichotomy has been constructed not only within the narrative of industrial modernization but, more crucially, as part of the taxonomies and circulations that supported the project of empire, ideologically, and materially. This background will provide context for considering craft as the hinge of an artwork but also as a risk for artists from regions like Southeast Asia, whose works become instrumental in the making of a “global” contemporary art.

Historical Economies of Craft

By now there is a substantial discourse around craft that theorizes the subject as more than highly skilled technical knowledge, or a material process defined by the handmade, or a taxonomy of objects designated by function. The current literature certainly takes us far beyond the art/craft dichotomy, even if developed from and generative of ongoing thinking about the ontological relations therein. Over the last twenty years, art historians, artists, practitioners, and cultural theorists have probed and expanded craft's histories to make arguments about the complexities of how craft operates and is articulated within diverse but often mutually constitutive economies of production. From a contemporary artistic viewpoint, craft *should* be recognized as having an identity of its own. However, folding craft into the conceptual frames of tradition, material, or process provides a shorthand and limited means of grasping what Louise Mazanti argues are the multiple cultural positions that craft inhabits. For Mazanti, it is far more productive to think critically about craft as a process of doing, rather than making; in other words, we must move away from a definition of craft that is predicated upon material- or technique-specificity to think more profoundly about "the role that it performs in the world of objects" (Mazanti 2011, 60). Anna Fariello concurs, suggesting that "[a] workable definition of craft depends very little on technique or medium at all. ... craft, as a discipline, is not so much about materials as it is about an approach to materials" (Fariello 2019, 40). For Glenn Adamson, it is craft as an avowedly cultural practice and a conceptual limit that has rendered its fraught position within and in relation to the modern conception of art, as embedded in the problem of autonomy (Adamson 2016). For Adamson, we may get to the ontology of craft through this entanglement; as it operates across or on either side of the familiar binary, we begin to understand craft as methodological and as something that has historically been defined as supplementary (following Derrida) to the paradigmatic progress of "Art" and within "Art" itself (Adamson 2016, 14).¹

Today, as numerous writers have noted, the relationship between craft and contemporary art seems considerably less fraught. As Julia Bryan-Wilson has described:

[w]ithin the twentieth century, art has constantly tested and refined itself against a series of ostensible opposites, such as "work," "life," or "craft"; the history of recent art is in part the narration of what happens when those divisions collapse or bleed into each other (Bryan-Wilson 2021, 13).

We now occupy a time when, according to Maria Elena Buszek, "[e]merging artists in today's art world enjoy a tremendous amount of freedom in exploring such craft media—so much so, in fact, that one might argue that art students today often take this freedom for granted as they develop their studio practice" (Buszek 2011, 6). This freedom, implied by Buszek, was hard won, given the trajectory of craft's development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, following a familiar narrative of its gradual transformation and instrumentalization as a category and lever of sociocultural and economic reform. The account is rooted in the context of Western industrialization, with an emphasis on Great Britain and the United States. In sum, in the mid-nineteenth century, new technologies of mass production transformed structures of labor and ways of making in the name of efficiency and progress. This situation catalyzed responses to what was perceived as a decline in standards of quality, aesthetics, and public taste. The British Arts and Crafts Movement provided leading voices in calls for reform, championing the revitalization and elevation of traditional craft industries and processes to drive spiritual and moral regeneration. This was an ideology infused by the pastoral ideal and a utopian imagination, but as a movement influenced by socialism, it also sought to restore agency to artisans in the realms of design and production to redress factory divisions of labor and product alienation (Morris 2010). As such, it

was in the context of its perceived decline and even disappearance in the face of industrialization that craft became articulated as a modern field of discourse and a discourse about modernity itself.

This summary does not do justice to the complexities, fault lines, and contradictions within the debates and approaches to craft in the mid- to late nineteenth century. However, this is the narrative that has long served as conventional knowledge and that supports observations of the liberation that contemporary artists may feel today in terms of treating the art and craft divide as a spectral artifact of history. However, historical writings on craft have since multiplied and complicated this narrative over the last three decades as postcolonial approaches have teased out the interconnectedness of developments in the West with those of the colonies and brought to the forefront the ways in which industrialization cannot be disambiguated from empire as the engine of changes associated with modernization. The field of craft production in the colonial context bore similarities with the discourses of disappearance and restoration led by the voices of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain; but in the colonies, these discourses indexed intersectional categories of race, class, and gender and were explicitly shaped through paradigms of civilizational development and what John M. MacKenzie (1995, 122) has described as romantic primitivism.

Using methodologies informed by art history, anthropology, and postcolonial studies, case studies from South Asia have brought this scholarship into prominence as they have emphasized how the discursive, institutional, and racialized disambiguation of art and craft was interwoven with the emergence of museums (in the colonies and the metropole) and economies of exhibition and display (see e.g. Guha-Thakurta 2004; Dutta 2007; Mathur 2007). As Saloni Mathur and others have argued, the field of these experiments in policy and production was constituted by concerns and developments that were occurring in Great Britain as well as in the South Asian colonies. Even if the Indian craftsman was seen to occupy an anterior position in developmental time, bound to cultural-geographical space, they could nonetheless provide an idealized symbolic figure informing the pastoral return and spiritual reform of British arts and crafts. And, as Mathur argues, this symbolism bore a legacy for the project of South Asian decolonization and nationhood:

For the emergence of a popular European interest in the Indian craftsman by the 1880s and the subsequent claiming of this figure by Indian nationalism—a dialectic I refer to as the “cult of the craftsman”—was a distinctive phenomenon signaling the crises related to industrialization in the colony and the modernizing processes of the period more generally. Supported by the multiple discourses of anthropology, ethnology, “good” design, art reform, and art education in both Britain and its Indian colony, the disputes about the labor and worth of the Indian craftsman map a range of economic and political anxieties in the popular arena regarding the passage into modernity from a preindustrial past (Mathur 2007, 29–30).

And if the Arts and Crafts Movement spokespersons advocated for the transformation of labor conditions and relations to endow British artisans with agency, it was typically the reverse situation in the colonies, where the discourse of preserving artistic heritage often served to undermine and appropriate the agency of the colonized subject (see Dutta 2007).

European colonial policies for the arts played out differently across the realms of empire. In French colonialism, and its architectural programs, for example, theories of assimilation (imposing models of the colonizer’s culture to perform civilizational hegemony and superiority) and association (integrating aspects of Indigenous cultural forms to demonstrate cooperative, allied governance) informed shifting directives in the French administration’s relationship to Indigenous arts and culture (see Wright 1991; Morton 2000). These shifts were nonetheless enacted to varying degrees across their colonies and protectorates from

North Africa to Southeast Asia. Regardless, what James Clifford has termed the salvage paradigm, “reflecting a desire to rescue something ‘authentic’ out of destructive historical changes,” resurfaces across these contexts as well, particularly in institutions and systems of pedagogy established by the French to “restore” and “protect” forms of artisanal production that they saw as exemplary achievements of the colonized race, imperiled by the European presence and the tides of industrial modernization (Clifford 1989). The language of disappearance and preservation thus echoed the discourse of craft reform in Great Britain, but in the colonial context, it provided a rationale for European paternalist intervention.

However, responses to this perceived threat varied depending on the individuals charged with instituting new systems of artistic pedagogy. In Algeria and Vietnam, certain colonial administrators who saw natural artistic aptitude in their native students led more liberal, at times controversial, pedagogical reforms—in the case of Algiers, for example—to “liberate the natural talent of Indigenous artists from the tendency to ‘perpetually retrace traditional models’ as well as the ‘templates’ [*poncifs*] that guide the hand and dispense with all mental initiative” (Benjamin 2003, 195).² According to Roger Benjamin, these seemingly altruistic campaigns to revive the Islamic decorative arts nonetheless justified the rhetoric of the *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission), in addition to fueling inspiration for French modern artists while generating economic value from artistic commodity production in the North African territories (Benjamin 2003, 191–219). At the School of Cambodian Arts in Phnom Penh, a more rigid artistic education focused on such methods of retracing traditional models as the operative work of restoring tradition and cultural heritage (as well as fueling transnational sales circuits for Cambodian craft commodities). Exposure to contemporaneous European artistic models and movements was deemed unsuitable for Cambodian students, who were tasked with preserving their craft traditions (what School Director George Groslier believed was predicated on Indigenous purity and racial genius) through the guidance of the French (Muan 2005; also see Abbe 2014). In contrast to this ideological and institutional ossification of the divide between modern art (deemed Western) and artisanry/decorative arts/craft (deemed Cambodian), during the founding years of the École des beaux arts de l’Indochine in Hanoi, the French director of the school (Victor Tardieu) collaborated with Vietnamese artist Nam Sơn (born Nguyễn Văn Thọ) to create a curriculum that saw potential for innovation and evolution from within artisanal traditions, such as lacquer work; in their view, craft and the decorative arts would serve as a site and stage for the development of a specifically Vietnamese modern art (see Taylor 1997; Herbelin 2010–2011).

Postcolonial scholarship has emphasized the role that colonial exhibitions and world fairs (and their newer iterations as cultural festivals) have played in promoting Indigenous craft traditions and, in some cases, introducing what was presented as emergent local modernisms as another example of European intervention and innovation. The focus was typically on the former as crafts were displayed to promote their economic potential and to participate in the spectacle of authenticity; native artisans were often brought to the exhibitions to perform their craft and to authenticate the experience of alterity. But, as mentioned earlier, the display of craft commodities also served the purpose of inspiring craft and decorative arts reform in the metropole. In the case of the great exhibitions that took place in London between 1851 and 1886, MacKenzie (1995, 119) argues that crafts and design products from the colonies were seen as a means of enhancing Western design traditions and improving the values and techniques of British artists and craftspeople. Roger Benjamin has also argued that the historiography of art deco has neglected the role that colonial exhibitions played in terms of informing modern European design, citing the colonial pavilions that exhibited arts and crafts from Algiers and Morocco such as those displayed at the 1925 International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts (Benjamin 2003, 210–213). And, in terms of introducing French publics to Vietnamese modern art, Phoebe

Scott has emphasized the significance of the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition as being the first major exhibition to distinguish a new social group of colonized subjects vis-à-vis the art and craft divide:

In the grounds of the Tonkin pavilion, Vietnamese artisans were part of a live exhibition, occupying a simulated village street, complete with stalls selling silk, lace, ivory and inlaid objects, jewellery, and sculpted and lacquered furniture. That the students of the EBAI [École de Beaux Arts de l'Indochine] were not positioned in such a way attests to their status (Scott 2019, 194).

Contemporary Interventions

Proliferating studies of modernism as a global matrix of interconnected and transnational developments attend to the significance of pedagogical institutions and sites of formation in the colonial context, which may have focused on artisanal training but also provided the grounds for nationalist and modernist formations. But it has also been noted that what might be considered more contemporary versions of these earlier world fairs and exhibitions have borne an impact on the development of contemporary artistic practices, particularly those of diasporic artists. On the influence of the Festival of India in the mid-1980s, Mathur (2007, 28) describes how “[m]ore recently, a new generation of South Asian artists in the diaspora have acknowledged the role of the Festival of India in introducing them to the aesthetic traditions of the subcontinent and, indirectly at least, influencing their work.” I have provided this historical background as an important context for thinking about the ways in which craft serves, but also at times may undermine, the reception of the works of contemporary artists from these formerly colonized regions, especially when they draw on craft forms and methods as a personal means of connecting to and engaging with cultural traditions. I will develop this point in more depth shortly, but this observation stems from an essay I published in 2016, which examined works by established artists Dinh Q. Lê (b. 1968, Vietnam) and Sopheap Pich (b. 1971, Cambodia), in which I argue that the recognition of elements and methods associated with vernacular, “local” craft traditions played an important part in their conceptual efficacy, and undoubtedly, global artworld appeal (Corey 2016). This is not a unique phenomenon, given the critical success of contemporary artists who employ craft within their practice. As Kirsty Robertson and Lisa Vinebaum observe:

What’s more, today, artists not always associated with craft or textiles such as Ghada Amer, Tracy Emin, Polly Apfelbaum, and Liza Lou, and including those enjoying a great deal of critical acclaim such as Tuttle, Michelle Grabner, Grayson Perry, Jim Drain, Theaster Gates, and William J. O’Brien, are using tapestry, embroidery, knitting, beading, ceramics, wood work and other forms of craft to make work celebrated at the heights of the art world. While we applaud this shift, we surmise that the embrace of craft and fiber stems at least in part from their increasing use by male artists, and we remain cognizant that many important women artists who have spent decades working with fiber materials remain under-recognized (Robertson and Vinebaum 2016, 4).

In recent scholarship focusing primarily on developments in North America and Europe, this historiographical gap has begun to be addressed, with emphasis given to the ways in which women artists and feminist art historians forged critical interventions in artistic and art historical practice, often turning to the spheres of domesticity, labor, and handicraft as crucial sites of resignification and challenges to the social order, even if the racial politics of institutional recognition remains an ongoing issue (Bryan-Wilson, 2021, 14–17).³

Perhaps seemingly adjacent to but nonetheless connected to these contexts is the question of craft in the development of contemporary art practices and discourses in the parts of the world that we conveniently identify as the global south. My own work has primarily been in Southeast Asia and its diasporas, a focus that nonetheless affords comparable contexts and responses to broader global developments (e.g. decolonization, globalization, neoliberal autocratic regimes) and the local specificities of their structural enactments and sociocultural formations. The tides of decolonization in the mid- to late twentieth century informed the inauguration of the contemporary as an undoubtedly political project in many parts of the world. If ideas of modernist autonomy, individualism, and internationalism were seen as yoked to colonial legacies of artistic formation or nationalist strategy, the contemporary was heralded in some instances as an alternative paradigm that could restore Indigenous and vernacular forms of collectivity and aesthetic production as a means of aesthetic and agentic innovation. In this, craft as an index of locality was a hinge of such discourses, resonating with Li Edelkoort's observation that craft is "an activity that expresses something about its own origins by utilising local resources" (Edelkoort 2003). In 1995, Indonesian artist, curator, and scholar Jim Supangkat cited Philippine artist Charlie Co's observation (made at a conference on Asian modernism held in Tokyo, Japan) that the use of locally sourced materials signified the departure from modernism and entry into the contemporary: "The modern era, in my view, was when I was still using Western materials. In this contemporary era, I use local materials."⁴

Beyond the use of locally sourced materials, however, was the formation of artistic discourses around the shared aesthetic ingenuity of craft practices, vernacular cultural forms, and contemporary art mediums, the interrelationships between which could provide the grounds for a decolonial and contemporary artistic identity. I want to explain here that what may appear to be my glossing of "craft" and "vernacular forms" is a choice; I am cognizant of both their differentiation but also their overlap as specific crafts are practiced with meticulous care to fulfill cultural, often ritual, functions. One can think of numerous instances in which the two come together, such as Balinese ceremonial offerings in the form of intricately handmade sculptural arrangements made from flowers or food products. Within the site of artistic discourse, the sourcing of such forms could index place, identity, and heritage in a specifically decolonial gesture of autonomy, in conversation with rather than in total rejection of Western paradigms. This would serve as a project of artistic and intellectual decolonization, as can be inferred by Raymundo R. Albano's 1981 review of an exhibition titled *Installations* held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Albano sought a definition of installation that accounted for the cultural specificity of its source in Philippine festival culture, as a counterpart to the "borrowed" legacy of painting as medium and discourse:

There is no other criteria in judging a painting than those for American or European art, simply because we have no native practice that is equivalent to this art. Purist scholars who love to dig into the indigenous will find no logical precedent for painting, unlike sculpture. It may be that our innate sense of space is not a static perception of flatness but an experience of mobility, performance, body-participation, physical relation at its most cohesive form. Thus installation is akin to *fiestas* and folk rituals, from all our ethnic groups (Albano 1981, 3).

The enunciation of craft and the vernacular as source and support for the empowerment of a post- or decolonial artistic discourse naturally served projects of nation building and identity formation for newly decolonized states. Such was the development of batik painting in Malaysia and lacquer painting in Vietnam, where in both instances the narrative of a local craft turned exemplary national and modern art form was privileged over the specific histories of such conversions under colonial pedagogy and/or patronage (e.g. Soon 2016). What may appear to recur here is the story of craft in the service of form, or a perceived

dissolution or porosity of the boundaries between art and craft that nonetheless affirms the binary as long as one appears to elevate the other. The relation of craft to and within modernism resurfaces here as one of supplementarity, as Adamson (2016, 9–37) argues: bringing into ontological definition that which it appears to frame or support.

A return to thinking about craft less as a category and more as a matrix of co-constitutive cultural positions, as Mazanti (2011, 59–82) suggests, offers productive avenues for examining contemporary projects that offer multiple ways of thinking about aesthetics, creativity, representation, and collaboration. As one such example, the work of Heri Dono (b. 1960, Indonesia) enables an understanding not only of craft's role in driving aesthetic and developmental economies in the contemporary globalized world but also of craft as an attitude toward collaborative making and democratized representation. Based in Yogyakarta, Dono is one of Indonesia's most established artists, from a generation of artists who came of age under Suharto's new Order Regime (1966–1998). Dono dropped out of art school (where he focused on painting) to study *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) under the master puppeteer (*dalang*) Pak Sigit Sukasman (Rath 2003, 44). As a medium of storytelling and as one of the most revered artistic forms of Indonesia (even if relegated to craft or the popular arts outside of the traditional academic art historical paradigms), *wayang* provided Dono with a means of staging multiple critical interventions into ideas of tradition as defined through national identity, notions of high and low culture, and the classical repertoire of *wayang* iconography and methods of production (for an extended version of this discussion, see Corey forthcoming). In describing the collective process behind Dono's conceptual development and production of puppets, Supangkat describes the artist's stance toward making and representation:

To Dono, recycling junk is an innovative practice because it is a cultural matter. "The facts show the efforts of poor people using tradition to survive in a difficult modern situation. The creations show how tradition continuously makes breakthroughs, not only for the sake of artistic means but more for survival," he believes. ... Heri Dono asked people to collaborate with him in making works of art, and those who were craftsmen graciously accepted the invitation. During the process of collaboration, these people did not just help Dono; they also gave him advice and ideas. Together they created works that not only show Dono's convictions. The art also reveals the surprising dreams, hopes, fantasies, and beliefs of the urban poor in facing today's harsh realities. And these, in turn, have enriched Dono's representation of the world (Supangkat 2003).

The interventions mentioned earlier were extended through *Wayang Legenda* (1988), referring to a set of some sixty hand-crafted puppets as well as the performance, scripted and performed by Dono as the *dalang*. As Amanda Rath emphasizes, part of *Wayang Legenda*'s significance lay in its introduction of non-Javanese cultural sources, even "unrepresentable" sectors of society, in addition to upsetting aesthetic conventions associated with the iconographic and aesthetic differentiation of moral types, problematizing "traditional social hierarchies mapped onto the *wayang* that have been inscribed into the psyche of most Indonesians as to what is appropriate to represent in certain cultural practices" (Rath 2003, 44; Romain 2016, 188). In addition, the use of languages other than Javanese, which is traditionally used in *wayang* performance and was the dialect instrumentalized for Suharto's cultural program of "Javanization" (itself a legacy of colonial cultural hierarchization), enabled Dono to assert the potential of *wayang* to pluralize Indonesian identity and decenter hegemonic concepts of culture:

To me, *wayang* is only a medium for expressing a story. And folk-tales, legends, and various types of folklore are widespread throughout Indonesia. Why do we only perform stories from the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Panji epics? As an Indonesian, I feel the

responsibility to make a contribution in the field of art. Say that each of the twenty-seven provinces in Indonesia has five folk-tales. How many folk-tales could then be made into *wayang* performances? Wouldn't *wayang* then truly become the property of the Indonesian people? (Wright 1994, 234).

Dono's artistic philosophy can be understood as an intervention into the high and low, specific to the context of Indonesian cultural paradigms, more so than a disruption of the art versus craft binary. These works were carried out in the 1980s, prior to the art world's increasing appetite for collective and relational practices that began to gain currency in the 1990s. This turn toward community-based and participatory practices in contemporary art has of course fostered conditions in which collective craft production serves as a medium of social relations, further facilitating the embrace of craft in contemporary art projects.

Nonetheless, the division continues to be revealed in the kinds of institutional and market spaces that frame these works. Craft in the service of form tends to be curated for modern and contemporary art museums and art fairs, while craft as form, more legible as garments or ceramics, for instance, may continue to be situated within institutional exhibition spaces designated for arts and design. One example of the former is an elegiac 2014 installation by Jakkai Siributr (b. 1969, Thailand) titled *78* (Figure 11.1), which was shown at Art Basel Hong Kong.⁵ Siributr pursued the textile arts in his undergraduate and graduate studies, and continues to work with sewing, embroidery, and textiles to enact introspective and often participatory projects in response to local and regional political developments in Thailand and Southeast Asia. A black shrouded structure referencing the Kaaba, *78* served as a memorial for the victims of the 2004 Tak Bai incident in which the Thai military arrested over 1,000 Muslim protesters in conflict-ridden southern Thailand and stacked them, like logs, in trucks to transport them to holding facilities. Seventy-eight prisoners were crushed or suffocated en route. A significant part of the power of Siributr's installation hinges upon the use of syncretic text that addresses and represents Muslim communities in Southeast Asia.⁶ On the exterior, the names of the seventy-eight identified victims are depicted in Thai characters stylized to resemble Arabic script, framed by gold tubing referencing tubular amulets (*takrut*). Inside, multi-tier bamboo bunk beds each hold a single white tunic, with sleeves embroidered in the

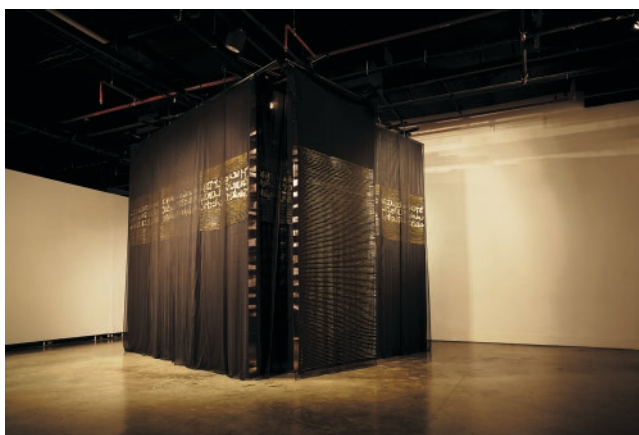


FIGURE 11.1 Jakkai Siributr, *78*, 2014, mobile room installation: steel, scaffolding, bamboo, textiles, kurta, threads, and brass-coil embroidery (350 × 350 × 350 centimeters, including wheels). Collection of MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum. Smit Na Nakornpanom.

Arabic-Malay Jawi script. The merging of Thai sign and Arabic script on the exterior obstructs the legibility of deliberately pictorialized text, adding to the pivotal force of the artwork as a spectral call to remember.

More recently, some of Siributr's more explicitly garment-based works were included in a 2022 exhibition titled *Garmenting: Costume as Contemporary Art* at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, curated by Alexandra Schwartz.⁷ The *Blind Faith* series (Figure 11.2) extends Siributr's observations of the lives of those affected by the conflicts and violence occurring in Thailand's south. The works consist of Thai military uniforms that the artist heavily embellished with Buddhist amulets and talismanic objects such as a *Yantra* (a protective cloth) as well as brass bullet casings. The ornamentation becomes an encompassing surface and armor-like layer, relegating the military uniform to something stripped of its authority. It becomes a hollowed gesture of national service as it is transformed into nothing more than a material support for an excess of symbolic objects that have traditionally served as more potent protective wards for warriors and for military conscripts today. The work was fueled by Siributr's observations of these young men, typically from rural backgrounds and limited socioeconomic circumstances, who purchased the talismans upon the realization that their service in the military would place them in actual sites of real violence and risk, comparable to what they perceived as war zones since the sectarian conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims in the first decade of the twenty-first century.



FIGURE 11.2 Jakkai Siributr, *Blind Faith*, 2019, military uniforms, amulets, glass beads, crochet. Courtesy of the artist. Chanupat Boonwong / Courtesy of Jakkai Siributr.

Iftikhar Dadi has described the affordances of craft as a crucial material, method, and language for contemporary artists working across the world today:

With the loosening of the formal language of Modernism, many fine artists now draw upon crafts practices to explore social and aesthetic dilemmas, by creating works which refer simultaneously to the specificity of artisanal practices and objects, while making works that address global issues (Dadi 2003, 4).

This is of course something to celebrate because of the conceptual and aesthetic richness of such works as those described earlier. But the ways in which such works harness ideological and market value, in ways that could benefit from diachronic thinking about past discourses and formations, particularly as shaped by colonialism, offer perspectives on the construction of ideological and market value in the global art world today.

In a special journal issue that I co-edited with Cambodian studies scholar and art historian Ashley Thompson in 2014, we noted in our editorial introduction that, in a set of reproduced essays on such objects as palm leaf screens and a rice threshing apparatus, the “types of materials and practices [the essays] document are crucial to ‘modern and contemporary Cambodian art’ even as, and even because, they sit outside of the global networks in which the said ‘art’ evolves” (Thompson and Corey 2014, 4). The use of such elements as craft to index the “local,” insofar as those elements remain recognized and maintained as such, support and facilitate an academic and art world discourse that articulates, even fetishizes, the “global” of contemporary art. And while artists may be celebrated within these circuits for their drawing of inspiration from and reworking of such sources, they may—at the same time—need to be defended from accusations of strategic self-Orientalism, as Kevin Chua (2021) claims in the case of Dinh Q. Lê and Sopheap Pich.⁸ A Catch-22 situation presents itself here, where such artists’ biographies and perceived modes of alterity are seen as indexes for their practices; the cultural referents are embraced, even over-determined, and also invoked as a challenge necessitating excessive justification of their works’ merit beyond cultural performance. Here craft may be an asset but also a burden, a problem that continues to stem from culturalist readings that overemphasize racial, gendered, and ethnic difference, particularly for those artists identified as inheritors of postcolonial legacies.

Notes

- 1 Derrida theorizes this concept of supplementarity through the parergon, which means something subordinate or accessory to the larger work or its principal subject (ergon). Derrida (1987, 9, 37–82) theorized it more specifically as a frame (or framing apparatus) that “gives rise” to the work, essentially constituting and elevating it as such.
- 2 Benjamin cites here from Alexandre (1907, 10). In the case of Algiers, the École supérieure des beaux-arts d’Alger was established in 1843, but diverse documentation and pedagogical initiatives were coordinated through the local activities of the Office of Indigenous Arts (est. 1908), and led by such figures as Prosper Ricard, who was influential in the careers of the celebrated artists Mohammed Racim and Azouaou Mammeri. In Vietnam, the École des beaux-arts de l’Indochine was established in 1925 under the directorship of French painter Victor Tardieu, but the vision for the school’s pedagogical program was developed in consultation with the Vietnamese artist Nam Sơn.
- 3 Bryan-Wilson notes, for example, that Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974–79) “has received necessary criticism for its deeply troubling racial politics, yet it is still granted institutional attention (it now occupies an entire specially built wing of the Brooklyn Museum of Art) disproportionate to that given to women artists of color such as [Faith] Ringgold, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Senga Nengudi, and Howardena Pindell, all of whom made work

- with textiles from needlework to pantyhose to banners to stuffed canvases in the 1970s” (Bryan-Wilson 2021, 17).
- 4 Comment made at the discussion “Asian Modernism,” Asia Center, Tokyo, Japan, held in conjunction with the exhibition *Asian Modernism*, October 1995. Cited in Supangkat (1997, 24).
 - 5 Siributr realized 78 in collaboration with the Bangkok-based architecture and design firm Design Qua.
 - 6 In Thailand, Muslims are a minority community, and the insurgencies in southern, peninsular Thailand should be understood as a legacy of the remapping of borders that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as negotiations with European powers were made by Thai monarchs to secure the sovereignty of what was then called Siam. In contrast, Islam is the dominant religion in Malaysia and Indonesia, and the official religion of Brunei.
 - 7 “The first global survey exhibition dedicated to the use of clothing as a medium of visual art, *Garmenting: Costume as Contemporary Art* examines work by thirty-five international contemporary artists, from established names to emerging voices, several of whom will be exhibiting for the first time in the United States. By making or altering clothing for expressive purposes, these artists create garments, sculpture, installation, and performance art that transform dress into a critical tool. Adopted globally as an artistic strategy, garmenting uses the language of fashion to challenge traditional divisions of form and function, cast a critical eye on the construction of gender, advance political activism, and address cultural difference.” Available at: <https://madmuseum.org/exhibition/garmenting-costume-contemporary-art>, accessed April 1, 2022.
 - 8 Kevin Chua (2021, 32 n13) suggests that Southeast Asian artists risk (or may even strategically employ) “(self)-Orientalism” by sourcing craft traditions in their work: “But the use of media other than painting may perpetuate modern, colonialist framings of the art/craft dichotomy set out in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Craft becomes—perhaps has always been—the false repository of cultural authenticity.”

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PERFORMANCE

Dreams and Visions in the Interval

Mlondolozzi Zondi

The President's Speech: Becoming South African

In May 1994, late President Nelson Mandela presented his first State of the Nation address as the first ever Black president of the Republic of South Africa. In the speech, he announced the new political dispensation's commitment to honoring those who "gave us the right to assert with pride that we are South Africans, that we are Africans, that we are citizens of the world."¹ The President's speech focused mostly on pragmatic policy and budgetary plans for economic development. One moment stood out in the speech where he discussed the role of creative practices in the anti-apartheid struggle. He specifically discussed one creative work, "The Child is not Dead," a poem by white Afrikaner poet, Ingrid Jonker (1933–1965) written in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre.² In the speech, Mandela cited Jonker's poem as one example of a "glorious vision ... in the aftermath of the massacre."³ The anti-pass struggle participants and freedom fighters of Sharpeville themselves were not invoked in the speech. The massacred Africans of Sharpeville, and other sites of massacres including Nyanga, Langa, and Orlando featured in the speech primarily as muse for Jonker's poetic meditation. The speech positioned Jonker's poem as a more revered or noteworthy response to the massacre and apartheid injustice in general. The poem supplemented the President's vision for a "new" South Africa, which involved following Jonker's footsteps in "transcending a particular [racist] experience and bec[o]m[ing] South African."⁴

In 2004, the ten-year anniversary of the democratic government and Mandela's speech, not only did President Thabo Mbeki quote the Jonker section of Mandela's 1994 speech in his own State of the Nation address but his administration emblazoned Jonker's memory with a posthumous Order of Ikhamanga, recognizing "her excellent contribution to literature and a commitment to the struggle for human rights and democracy in South Africa."⁵ Mandela's task was to facilitate unity during the "peaceful transition."⁶ The canonization of Jonker and continuous celebration of her poetic achievement was put in service for an integrationist strategy aimed at showing whites and apartheid proponents a new roadmap for post-apartheid nation building. The speech attempted to persuade Blacks and non-whites that not all white people were malicious participants of apartheid. In a country with an abundance of revolution-inflected anti-apartheid poetry, particularly in response to Sharpeville, what particularly rendered Jonker the chosen candidate for the post-apartheid transitional vision? At this critical

precipice where the regime's dissolution intensified fears of a vindictive Black danger, general curiosity arose about the nature of the new leadership and its repertoire of promises. The excitement and anticipation (or fear for some) rested between a president who would either intensify the anti-apartheid antagonism with unwavering liberatory Black demands, or one whose efforts would invest in burying the hatchet (and indeed the AK47) in pursuit of racial unification.⁷ Amid anxiety about an encroaching Black revenge, it is plausible that the President's veneration of a dead white poet assuaged white fear by guaranteeing whites full citizenship and a good life in post-apartheid South Africa. Jonker became a fitting emblem for the "nonracialism" desired most in post-apartheid liberal discourse (see Dladla 2020). With the mention of Sharpeville only as inspiration for Jonker's dream, the President skirted the danger of canonizing the anti-pass/anti-apartheid "vision" as Jonker's invention. By absenting the radical, resistive, and revolutionary struggles that led to the dawn of democracy, Mandela's speech muted his own remarkable contribution to the termination of legal apartheid.

The invocation of the poem set the tone for how politically meditative cultural objects align themselves with anti-apartheid struggle, either as adjacent supplement or direct extension of the struggle. The interval leading up to the democratic election of President Mandela in 1994 was a moment of contemplating the role of art in post-apartheid South Africa, the formal and political choices from apartheid-era art to uphold and approaches to cultural production that needed reconsideration. This chapter traces these alignments between cultural production, party politics/policy, and the political in general, as well as the material consequences of these alignments. With a focus on 1980–2010—a crucial period in not only determining the politico-aesthetic sensibilities of post-apartheid but also how the arts would remember apartheid and respond to new calls for nation building—this chapter focuses on a set of practices and representational strategies that contemplated the dissolution of apartheid. As a matter of course, this pursuit must take into consideration the two dominant discursive tendencies of engaging art and politics, namely, the hypervaluation of the power of art to stand in for revolution itself, and on the other hand, the total trivialization of art practice and the artist as distractions to politics. The examples I discuss include works by performance and visual artists such as Ernest Cole, Paul Stopforth, the Medu Art Ensemble, Steven Cohen, and others.

My interests lie in the apartheid state's pernicious and punitive regulations of images and performances as well as post-apartheid imagery that invokes the apartheid figuration of injury, insisting on questions of suffering rather than adhering to the call to move beyond. Rather than serving merely as documentary procedures, or reflections on violent events relegated to the past, such works are driven by an identification with violated Black figures portrayed in iconic apartheid photographs and paintings. They revisit apartheid terror instead of establishing a structure of identification solely with post-apartheid utopian desires, exposing the gaps of the apartheid visual archive, what the regime permitted for visualizing itself and what it absented or erased. A prevalent topic in post-apartheid is the interrogation of the gendered intricacies of racialized terror, and this focus gave rise to artists working in the medium of performance art. These works wrestle with authoritative global discourses of the 1990s about the politics of representation, globalization, cultural imperialism, and critiques of Identitarian knowledge-making. There was a serious contemplation on how these gendered subjectivities would *enter* the field of vision/politics, on whose terms, on what presumptions, and the stakes of such incorporation into or rejection of the national project.

Performance, Word-making, and World-making

Performance in this chapter refers to framed (theatrical) enactments (including concert dance and site-specific enactments). It is also located in what Cecilio Cooper calls "atypical objects"—modes of performance that are uncommon in traditional performance scholarship such as painting, sculpture, rhetoric, and Black political insurgency inclusive of but

irreducible to protest (Cooper and Wilderson 2020). Performance is not only an object of study but also an analytic tool to gauge what is *enacted* by utterances such as Mandela's. Performance as an analytic also encourages a mode of reading images beyond an exclusively ocularcentric focus, directing attention to what images enact, the sound they emit, and their kinesthetic and affective dimensions—how images are captured in a way that moves the viewer or stirs emotions (see Moten 2003; Campt 2017). This goes beyond visual representations of performance in images or references to performance in the written word/speech.

In performance theory, some utterances are regarded as functioning beyond description, but, in the words of philosopher J. L. Austin, as “doing things in the world” (Austin 1962). Austin's speech act theory proposes that “the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action” (Austin 1962). He calls this type of utterance a *performative utterance*, meaning that words may not (sufficiently) reflect the world but they do *make* it, they act as well as order and deploy others to act. It is with this assumption about utterance as performative that I approach Mandela's speech. However, the structural positioning of Blackness and Black speech outside the order of the world, through multiple scales of violence, complicates the universal applicability of Austin's argument about the capacity of all (performative) speech to make worlds. If Black speech and Black life is “not lived in the world that the world lives in” (Sexton 2012), then there is a difference between words that can do things in the world and words that are structurally silenced and endowed with communicative capacity only when augmented by human (non-Black) speech.

My argument about the impossibility of unfettered Black articulation is informed by the intellectual contributions of Afro-pessimism, a Black analytical framework that describes how the current order requires the augmentation of Black speech with human/full speech to gain auditors (see Hartman 1997; Wilderson 2015). This anti-Black structural silencing is neither synonymous with nor reducible to Austin's “infelicitous speech” that he also refers to as failed speech (see Austin 1962; Neyra 2022). Black speech, especially in the business of politics, exists as coerced or borrowed speech, which Frank Wilderson positions as the opposite of full speech.⁸ Put differently, for Black speech to be heard, there is a requirement for it to subdue its unflinching performative criticality and dress it with the language of humans (such as non-Black feminism, Marxism, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, etc.). When articulated outside of this borrowed augmentation, Black performative speech may manifest as an (illegible) language in the form of an indecipherable scream/howl (turned language or song) or opaque performativity whose unintelligibility attracts all kinds of projections attempting to pin down its meaning (see Moten 2003). I share Ren Ellis Neyra's criticism of what they call the “low-key-protestant-literalism of speech act theory” (Neyra 2022). Speech act theory is an inadequate account of the Black condition because of the universalizing assumptive logic underpinning its embrace of the concept of “worlding” and the assumption that all words, including Black, can participate with ease in doing things in the world. Ellis Neyra describes this as “a discursive situation that compulsively makes Black suffering and death necessary for ‘worlding’” (see Neyra 2022). Both “world” and “word” are deranged by an encounter with Blackness.

The Black president's speech, then, cannot be understood with utmost confidence as an articulation operating outside of this economy of borrowed speech. In fact, President Mandela's known speech writers involve white writers such as Raymond Suttner and Carolyn Hamilton, the latter whose personal profile states that “After Madiba [Mandela] was released in 1990, she had the ‘terrifying honour’ of being one of his speechwriters.”⁹ The President's speech cannot be fully characterized as an articulation of his own authority or desire. It is licensed speech, much like a theater actor delivers the playwright's script with relative conviction, carrying out the prerogatives of post-neo-apartheid nationalism.

The Function of Culture

In the late 1980s, when it became clear that the legal apartheid regime would be forced to cease administrative operations, South African thinkers such as Njabulo Ndebele and Albie Sachs published meditations on the role of aesthetics in a democratic post-apartheid South Africa (see Ndebele 1991; Sachs 1991). They surveyed past approaches to aesthetic form and attendant political commitments, noting the spectacular character and overt politicking of apartheid-era visual art, performance, and literature that adopted such features in a desperate attempt to call out and dismantle intense and severe brutality against Black people in the 1980s. This is a violence that led to the government declaring a state of emergency and the international community imposing sanctions on South Africa. Sachs and Ndebele responded to a Black aesthetic tradition mainly from the 1970s–1990s that focused mostly on a response to spectacular violence. These forms of performance and visual art brought awareness to the violence by portraying it in literal ways. Sachs's speech was presented in an African National Congress (ANC) meeting in Lusaka in 1989 and he notably made a case for affirmative action and argued against censorship. His call to temporarily "ban culture [as] a weapon of struggle" was a call for artists to "improve the quality of their work" (Sachs 1991). He noticed in anti-apartheid liberation cultural practice a tendency to foreground political struggle at the expense of "ambiguity and contradiction" (Sachs 1991). As an ANC member himself, Sachs's aesthetic theory aimed to make post-apartheid aesthetics adhere to the new constitutional order.

Both Sachs and Ndebele were curious about what would emerge if South African artists moved away from spectacular portrayals of violence and attended to more mundane details of Black life during apartheid. The hope was that this turn would reveal intricate details about Black interiority, and it would "free" the artist to make formal aesthetic interventions that did not (overtly) centralize political struggle. Ndebele (1991) defined the spectacular as:

highly dramatic, highly demonstrative form ... whose ingredients are precisely the triteness and barrenness of thought, the almost deliberate waste of intellectual energy on trivialities ... the complete exteriority of everything ... subtlety is avoided: what is intended is spectacular demonstration at all costs. What matters is what is seen. Thinking is secondary to seeing. Subtlety is secondary to obviousness.

Ndebele's "ordinary" is the opposite of an uncritical celebration of the banal and subtlety, but it considers nuances overlooked in the spectacle's strategic alignment with the revolutionary cause.

I concur with Ndebele's and Sachs's suggestions for an opening up of Black art to more conceptual and abstract registers, as well as paying more attention to forgotten corners of "the ordinary." However, my discussion of representations of apartheid psychosomatic injury moves away from jettisoning the study of Black suffering as either passé or limiting during the political transition. The hope in the air during the transition period drove Sachs to ask, "are we ready for freedom, or do we prefer to be angry victims?" (Sachs 1991). This implied that there was less to be angry about and that "victimhood" was a thing of the past inhibiting artists at the dawn of post-apartheid. A desirable and noteworthy aesthetic for Sachs was that which "bypasses, overwhelms, ignores apartheid, establishes its own space" (Sachs 1991). He presented apartheid as the opposite of a totality because it licensed "fun and romanticism and dreams," and he perceived these characteristics as antithetical to apartheid machinations (Sachs 1991). Injury, however, can be located in both spectacular and forgotten/ordinary corners of Black existence in apartheid South Africa. Black recreation was sometimes provisionally permitted by (not in spite of) apartheid. Apartheid also blurred easy distinctions between spectacular and mundane violence. Spectacular images of

tortured and murdered Black people became a banal visual staple. Domestic and private spaces were sites of unspoken intense violence. While exceptional in nature, these scenes of private and publicly performed brutality became ordinary occurrences.

The apartheid visual repertoire is permeated with depictions of wounded Black flesh captured in moments of violation as well as corpses laying lifelessly on the street. Images of police dogs attacking Black people, massacres, mass funerals, and protesters getting hosed down with police water cannons all form part of the iconography of the despotic regime. There are more “ordinary” images taken by artists such as Santu Mofokeng, Omar Badsha, Ernest Cole, and others that portray everyday life of migrant workers in the mines, religious prayer gatherings, and recreational social gatherings in Black night clubs and sports events etc. Any presumed respite ascribed to the ordinary is attacked at every turn by “*Slegs Blankes*” (“Whites Only”) signs, which pervade much of the private and public landscape. The pictured *mise-en-scène*, even when lacking racist iconography, discloses the horrors of apartheid’s spatial distribution enabled by the Group Areas Act and preceding correlate laws that severed Blackness from geography while partitioning agricultural, residential, recreational, maritime, and air space as whiteness’ God-ordained property. Paging through apartheid-era issues of the progressive *Drum Magazine* and other publications also exposes the reader to ubiquitous advertising of skin-lightening serums and soaps that promote whitening as a rite of passage and imperative for modern Black upward mobility. There is plenty that is not pictured, horrors and cruel enjoyments that do not make it to the archive as well as those that are either suppressed and/or destroyed by both individuals and state actors.

In performance, artists who received training in classical ballet and modern/contemporary dance such as Jay Pather, Robyn Orlin, Boyzie Cekwana, and Steven Cohen severed fixed allegiance with Western classical performance forms in the 1990s and early 2000s to embrace experimental, improvisational, site-specific, and concept-based modes of performance-making.¹⁰ These modes focused predominantly on subject matter related to race, gender, sexuality, class, etc., as well as more abstract leitmotifs such as temporality, speed, direction, and object-oriented composition. Formal aesthetic decisions both complied with and exceeded Albie Sachs’s manifesto by responding to global demands for artistic innovation grounded in sociopolitical issues. Their emergence or increased “visibility” was partly made possible by the “fruits” of a budding democracy, which for Sachs (and by extension for the ANC) mandated a move away from revolutionary sensibilities and approaches. Sachs’s argument was not merely about promoting new and improved or more sophisticated ways of engaging “our” apparently shared realities through art and culture. Given the events and investments of the ANC (President Mandela’s party, which he spoke on behalf of) at that juncture, it is worth underscoring that his aesthetic theory coheres with the political party’s turn to a mode of “preparing ourselves for freedom,” that involved banning all (perceived) revolutionary formations and acts of practice. Art critic Athi Joja describes the ANC’s 1980s–1990s turn at length as follows:

What remained a conspicuously untreated, but nevertheless interesting enigma, is how the renunciation of art as a weapon of struggle coevally transpired at the crossroads of growing revolutionary energy and compromise. In fact, Sachs’s project must be understood within the broader ANC party line commanding that all revolutionary forces be liquidated. That is, *the disbanding of the armed wing, Umkhonto Wesizwe, and the depoliticization of culture are analogous*. So, the fate of cultural practices—to cease being an ideologically informed critical enterprise, emanates from the liberation movement’s own counter-revolutionary position.” (Joja 2014)

For Joja, Sachs’s call to “abandon culture as a weapon of struggle” happened coevally with the ANC’s disbanding of its own armed wing, and this launched the politically taciturn days of our lives. Taciturn in the sense that apartheid-era Black demands and modes

of articulating those demands were prohibited or vilified by the likes of Sachs and Mandela to make space for a peaceful transition benefiting white citizens. In this new vision of the role of culture in post-apartheid nation building, politicized art became acceptable predominantly as a substitute for a liquidated revolution or a supplement for constitutional goals. Post-1994 political or counter-hegemonic art and performance ironically took part in the de-radicalization of culture, since aesthetics came to be known as the revolution itself, rather than a mode of instigating revolutionary thought and praxis. The ANC took a “counter-revolutionary” position that was choreographed in the service of making culture and its creators adhere to the party’s “compromise” or a “sellout” project.¹¹ In other words, Sachs’s aesthetic theory was a treatise drafted to tether the masses to the new status quo, a realization of the dream of neoliberal democracy.

Therefore, post-1994 neoliberal culture is not characterized by the complete repudiation of ideology. On the contrary, in this regime, cultural/artistic practice “functions as the unmarked creative double of politics,” as well as a tool for the ruling elite’s political ideology (Joja 2014). Ideology in artistic forms was not completely overthrown after 1994. Rather, some artistic forms adhered to the mantra of the new ruling elite’s multicultural rainbowisms, anti-revolutionary positions, and the self-serving autocritical stance that interdicted critique from outside, exemplifying the contradictions of democracy. This is to say that the ruling elite’s intentions were, and are still, buttressed and concealed by what is presented to the masses as innocent festivities: festivals, concerts, sport, and recreation, as well as high formalist artistic endeavors that proclaim to present art for art’s sake. The method of ruling and muting the revolutionary agenda (or at least practices of speaking back to/against the flaws of the current democratic government), happens through co-opting the idea of culture as ideology. It is then used as a kind of opium, in this case to lull the Black masses to slumber. Politicized post-1994 Black art, unlike before, came to be supported, fiscally and otherwise, by the new democratic government, which had also paradoxically drafted a plan for art-making to cease being an ideologically informed critical enterprise, as Joja intimates. This means that post-apartheid artists, even politicized ones, are implicated in the “compromise” project, their overt political stance notwithstanding. Their projects are entangled in the reproduction and endorsement of the ideologically taciturn demands of democracy. Overtly political artistic practices that attempt to challenge Sachs’s thesis also find themselves muting those critical voices that organize against the “compromise” directives of post-apartheid democracy. Often, overtly political works hide more than reveal, obfuscate rather than illuminate, the various machinations of power and domination they profess to critique. Thus, the ethical quagmire confronting contemporary culture and its workers emanates from this culture’s “retain[ment] of its many contradictions even when it simulates a critique” (Joja 2014).

Apartheid’s unceasing supply of grimness, cruelty, and depravation inaugurated an improvisatory Black quotidian resistance of varying intensities. This Black improvisation is understated or erased as a driving force for a contemporary art sensibility emerging out of material conditions. Art writers tend to attribute the emergence and success of distinct post-apartheid forms to benevolent white artistic “pioneers” who imparted their knowledge and skills upon Black subjects who purportedly lacked an aesthetic education (for an example of this unfortunate tendency, see Cole 2020). The Black economic condition also launched an improvisatory response of not simply making do but inventing new forms with scraps for survival. This is far from a romantic or heroic celebration of Black improvisation as proof of Black people’s enduring spirit or bottomless alchemic powers to transmute suffering into the tranquilized aesthetic object. The *terrible improvisation* I remark upon was generated out of Black (artistic) antagonism against apartheid.¹² It contributed to a distinguishable repertoire of contemporary South African aesthetics. Contemporary South African art depends on or inherits material from this improvisation that gets effaced by the lauding of “pioneers.”¹³ Post-apartheid white contemporary art and curatorship

appropriates, accumulates, and/or codifies this improvisation and absorbs it into regimes of *work*.¹⁴ In other words, the post-apartheid art industry flourishes partly by maintaining the prevailing penchant to turn this *terrible improvisation* into *works of art*.

A noteworthy example of anti-apartheid artistic practices is the figuration of the corpse, a practice generally frowned upon as an unethical aestheticization capitalizing on Black death. Examples of this aestheticization of Black death include the sale of lynching photographs in the twentieth century in the United States, as well as late white South African photographer Kevin Carter's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph taken in 1993 of an emaciated Sudanese toddler named Kong Nyong placed on the ground with a vulture lurking behind him. Scholars such as Harvey Young (2010), David Marriott (2000), Saidiya Hartman (1997), and Leigh Raiford (2011) have critiqued the former, and Kimberly Juanita Brown (2014) and Zamansele Nsele (2019) have offered critical commentary on Carter's image. The international community came to know of apartheid brutalities partly through images and performances portraying the regime. South African photographer Ernest Cole's 1967 silver gelatin photograph titled *During Group Examination, the Nude Men Are Herded Through a String of Doctors' Offices* (Figure 12.1) is one example of an image that reappears in post-apartheid visual culture. The appeal of Cole's photograph spans across artistic genres. It is emblematic of the ceaseless reproduction of iconic imagery associated with Black suffering under apartheid.¹⁵ Cole's photograph portrays migrant mineworkers in South Africa in the 1960s undergoing invasive medical examinations. Thirteen adult men stand in a horizontal line, facing a black wall. They are all naked, except one on the left who wears a pair of black trousers. They face a wall, and the camera captures their backs. Their arms are raised in a uniform position, open for surveillance and ready to be examined. On the floor lies sheets of white paper that are placed behind each man's feet.

Post-apartheid artists' works that directly or obliquely invoked the image through re-enactment and/or photographic reproduction include Themba Mbuli's *Dark Cell* (2014), Sam Nhlengethwa's *Humiliation* (2004), Hank Willis Thomas's *Raise Up* (2014), Tony Miyambo and Phala Ookeditse Phala's *Kafka's Ape* (2015), Nandipha Mntambo's *Beginning of Empire* (2007), and Mohau Modisakeng's *iButbo* (2010). These artists attend to the photograph to broach conditions of the present meditating on the humiliation and injustice associated with the men photographed by Cole. Their return to and re-imagining of the picture tends to those lives still consigned to domination and unceasing vulnerability. The late choreographer Themba Mbuli's *Dark Cell* (2014) reveals apartheid policing practices as well as what he conceptualized as a form of symbolic mental imprisonment in the



FIGURE 12.1 Ernest Cole, *During Group Examination, the Nude Men are Herded Through a String of Doctors' Offices*, 1967. Photograph by Ernest Cole's.

present. Mbuli establishes a “corporeal affinity” with the pictured men, identifying with them by simulating their nude status in performance, oscillating between time periods without conflating them (Copeland 2013). Hank Willis Thomas’s *Raise Up* simulates the gesture of raised hands from Cole’s photograph and enacts a diasporic intertextuality that simultaneously invokes police brutality in the United States. The bronze is soldered to reproduce the top part of Cole’s image, showing only the heads and raised arms.¹⁶ Sam Nhlengethwa’s *Humiliation* inserts the perpetrator of apartheid violence in the picture, reversing the predominant and privileged depiction of Black victimhood. His collaging technique involves pasting a cut out of an apartheid security official on the photograph to ensure that the perpetrator of violence is seen. And finally, Nandipha Mntambo’s *Beginning of Empire* (2007) is a series of cowhide sculptures shaped to represent the feminized form, invoking the need to also engage Black women’s struggles. The reappearing image is reproduced for purposes of commemoration as well as visualizing what the desired future need *not* be. These images and performances seek to unveil some silences about racial violence in the official document. The reproduction of the image of the dead has a natal function, to produce *life* by insisting that which is dead *lives*. It also contains a *fatal* function that ensures that imagistic remains of the dead are etched on the onlooker’s retina as what David Marriott (2000) called “dead fantasies,” as those fantasies elicit pleasure. This is a desire to see images of Black death repeatedly until they get imprinted on the onlooker’s memory and become a ground on which they make claims of empathy. The global outcry and organizing against apartheid also took place in the curatorial field.¹⁷ The difference between visual art and performance participation rested partly upon the capacity to travel. It was challenging for performing artists to procure travel authorization documents whereas works of fine art could be transported and exhibited without requiring the artist’s physical presence. The political efficacy of these artistic endeavors remained contested. According to Sue Williamson:

artists who made work that was critical of the government suffered repercussions. The answer is that most of the time, they did not. The police in South Africa were far more likely to ban or place under house arrest popular leaders and activists than worry about the effect of political art on the population ... probably officials considered art unimportant and peripheral and the small gallery-going public an elitist minority unlikely to cause any trouble in the streets (Williamson 1999).

For Williamson, the effects of politicized art were largely immaterial and of minor importance to the state apparatus. In contrast, Catherine Cole’s *Performance and the Afterlives of Injustice* (2020) and David Koloane’s “Postapartheid Expression and A New Voice” (1999) each offer an alternative account from that of Williamson concerning the degree of state intervention on matters of anti-apartheid cultural production. Cole dispels the idea that state officials spared artists from retaliatory violence, especially those working in theater and performance. She notes that, during this period, theater makers “had to contend with police harassment, surveillance, interruptions of performances, and demands that all theaters have separate accommodations for different races” (Cole 2020).¹⁸ According to Koloane (1999), “apartheid security agents hovered like vultures over the theater, ready to pounce, detain, and interrogate, and to censor anything they considered subversive.”

Anti-apartheid Black artists were aware of these collisions between the state and politicized cultural production, which explains their orientation toward politics and their gravitating toward direct affiliation with movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement; they carried out active propaganda against apartheid.¹⁹ Meanwhile, progressive apartheid-era galleries were interested in artworks created by Black people. However, this effort capitulated to a typical primitivist fervor when engaging with African art since it was profitable for what Koloane termed “unscrupulous dealers” to promote a submarket in “‘African art’ and

‘Township art’”²⁰ This situation recapitulated colonial era depictions of Africans and it participated in a logic of othering deployed to make Africans appear as species of alterity. It reinforced ways of seeing and picturing the African as frozen in their primitive state. It also maintained the colonial selective preservation of certain indigenous aesthetics that were beneficial to the colonist, while suppressing those that had a sensibility of dissent.

The “Terrorist” Art Object

Anti-apartheid cultural work cannot be neatly categorized *in toto* within the realm of culture since some artistic works were engrained in what Frank Wilderson calls the (anti-apartheid) *culture of politics*, often through *agit prop* and direct propaganda.²¹ The Black person with anti-apartheid ideations and affiliations became a threat and was scapegoated as a communist, regardless of affiliation with the communist movement. The communist scapegoating strategy allowed the apartheid state allyship with Western nation states committed to similar strategies of isolating threats, which in South Africa involved labeling the anti-apartheid artist/activist a “terrorist.” Not only did the security police consider struggle activities to be “terrorist” acts but the works of art were also regarded as direct political activism. One noteworthy example of this aggression involves Thami Mnyele, exiled in Botswana for his political involvements and known for his work with the Medu Art Ensemble. Mnyele was assassinated by Craig Williamson of the South African Defense Force when they attacked Gaborone in 1985 (Serote 1999). In addition to murdering Mnyele and eleven other people, including a child, Williamson also stole Mnyele’s paintings (Serote 1999).

The Medu ensemble included members such as Mnyele, Keorapetse Kgositsile, Wally Mongane Serote, and Judy Seidman (see Figure 12.2). Their commitment was the education and politicization of the masses through culture while emphasizing “the need to relate artistic labour to productive labour.”²² In an exchange with art critic Joja, Judy Seidman contends that Medu’s emphasis on art as labor had more to do with fashioning a collective identity than an assertion of a “workerist” model (Seidman 2020). Medu’s affiliation with the ANC and inclusion of a white member such as Seidman differed from the political strategy of the Black Consciousness Movement, which championed a space for Black people to work out their political problems and programs outside of (liberal or otherwise) white presence, intrusion, or infiltration. Joja directs attention to Medu’s affiliations with the ANC



FIGURE 12.2 Medu Art Ensemble, *Support the Cultural Boycott*, 1982. Judy Ann Seidman/The Art Institute of Chicago/ART RESOURCE

and their “ambivalent” uptake and mobilization of Black Consciousness by presenting it as “a ‘narrow nationalism’ primarily for excluding whites, thereby making Medu their progressive successor. On the other side, Black Consciousness is fully in operation within the non-racialist precincts of Medu, articulated beyond its nationalistic invariance” (Joja 2020). These affiliations and ambivalences (or disavowals) raise questions about whether Medu can be implicated in Sach’s overrepresentation of “ANC culture” as “our culture.”²³ Medu’s ambivalences involved simultaneously challenging the government through their unflinching posters while also regarding non-ANC and non-multiracial movements with condescension. The apartheid government’s naming of artistic practices of Medu as “terroristic” was less about the degree of their radical force than their mere position as challenging the state. In this instance, the assignation of “terrorist” to artists and art objects was a strategy used by the government to justify detaining and murdering political dissidents.

Thami Mnyele’s theory of art connected it directly to social/political function, as he asserted that for him “the act of creating art should complement the act of creating shelter for my family or liberating the country for m[y] people. This is culture.”²⁴ However, this orientation toward the social and political function of art took place beyond reflection and the domain of dialogue. Mnyele theorized the move beyond the language of protest with its inherent complaint and “moaning,” stating, “we must partake actively in the struggle to paint sincerely.”²⁵ He participated in the Mhloti Black Theatre to “eradicate” the white-run art industry that enjoyed the hegemonic power to project its “aspirations, desires and wishes” upon Black art. He and Medu called for a move beyond a desire for representation or incorporation within a visual regime upheld by a fascist government. Following Mnyele’s assassination, the same Defense Force Security Major Craig Williamson “displayed the portfolio and the works in it on SABC television, as evidence of Thami’s ‘terrorist’ activities.”²⁶ The works themselves were regarded as inseparable from the artist. The art works were deemed “terrorist” to deter the public from participating in struggle and, to date, “these works have not been recovered from the security police.”²⁷ Medu posters were a mode of leaning toward the law’s repercussions, anticipating, and embracing the inevitable consequences for the ungovernable.

The Jubilant Object

Okwui Enwezor noticed in transition-era art “a representational terrain still dominated by highly literate; but nonetheless unreflexive white cultural practitioners unblinkingly intent on representing black subjectivity at the margins of the cultural and aesthetic discourse” (Enwezor 1997). Here, he referred to how white artistic production—likely determined *to transcend a particular (racist) experience and become South African*—asserted political and affective affinity to Black experience, invoking the Black corporeal form in visual culture or, in the theater, participating in the boom of intercultural collaboration. Paul Stopforth’s relief sculpture, *Freedom Dancer: The South African* (1993) (Figure 12.3) is one example of the “Black body’s” mutability and susceptibility to all kinds of projections that supplement non-Black psycho-affective reflection. The work portrays a snapshot of a phenotypically Black dancer situated mid-air, facing the direction of their feet while performing a grand jump. The dancer, wearing a green suit, is held by yellow-colored hands, a color palette approximating the iconic colors of the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).²⁸ Stopforth’s artwork was donated to the South African Constitutional Court in 2003 before the tenth anniversary of the country’s democracy, paralleling the timing for Ingrid Jonker’s Order of Ikhamanga veneration.

The hand is a recurring theme in Stopforth’s body of work. His post-apartheid work expresses his attunement to Buddhist philosophies and practices after he left apartheid for the United States. Buddhism’s connotations associated with the *mudra* partly drive his



FIGURE 12.3 Paul Stopforth, *Freedom Dancer*, 1993. Courtesy of Paul Stopforth.

artistic fascination with hands.²⁹ Previously, Stopforth had developed a fascination with the detail of the hand while creating work about political insurgents assassinated by apartheid security police. According to Sandra Klopper (as if echoing Albie Sachs), Stopforth's later works such as *Freedom Dancer* "bear witness to Stopforth's conviction that it was pointless to produce work alluding to the political situation in South Africa once he had settled in the US."³⁰ But it is not as clear-cut since Klopper also notices that he "continued to grapple with the notion of human suffering—his own as well as that of others"³¹ *Freedom Dancer* is understood by Klopper as Stopforth's departure from his "bleakly pessimistic" work of the 1970s and 1980s.³² She cites Stopforth describing the hands as "hold[ing] the dancer who is consequently free to express himself in the secure knowledge that he is protected from *all* possible danger"³³ In Klopper's reading of the artwork, Stopforth imbues the post-apartheid period with a utopian vision devoid of all danger and assigns to the period a certain transcendence from the machinations of apartheid. In her consideration of *Freedom Dancer*, Klopper attributes her reduction of Black dance to "joyous affirmation" to the conventions of unspecified "independent churches."³⁴

Where else to go to represent this somewhat naïve celebration of "joyous affirmation" than visually recruit a pre-packaged signifier of Black jubilation—the Black dancer. As concept and material flesh, "the Black body," whether jubilant or in distress/dissent, inexhaustibly bestows the country with its visual *fortunes*. The vexed trope of the spectacular and affectable dancing African surrounded by yellow fingers (much like bananas surround Josephine Baker's waist in photographs of the African American dancer in France in the 1920s) attests to what Ndebele deemed problematic in his call for the return to the ordinary. Prominent theatrical dancemakers in the 1990s such as Sylvia Glasser, Boyzie Cekwana, Robyn Orlin, Jeanette Ginsloy, Jay Pather, and others were less convinced by the easy ascription of "joyous affirmation" to dance, especially in the context of (rainbow) nationalism. Although not exempt from equivocal uses of "the Black body" themselves, they conceived of the dancing body as a charged site for memories of and responses to violence. Contemporary dance, then, had to develop a more nuanced vocabulary for understanding the dancing body, irreducible to normative associations and opting for that which was taboo, melancholic, or horrific. The professional dance scene also became a site for a refurbished primitivism, an attempt at honoring indigenous dance forms by absorbing them into the category of contemporary dance. This subsumption, intercultural and multiracial in appearance, was termed "afro-fusion" and its characteristics capitulated to tenets of the rainbow nationalism they critiqued.

The Queer Abject

Post-1994 opened space for increased visibility in queer and feminist artistic practices. Not only was this a response to a void or lack in queer representation, but the art-world had to *invent* its language while keeping up with what the multiculturalist global neoliberal art market had codified as in-demand in the 1990s. Artists such as Steven Cohen and others who gained prominence in the 2000s including Mamela Nyamza, Gregory Maqoma, Athi Patra Ruga, Zanele Muholi, FAKA, Gavin Krastin, and Sabelo Mlangeni critiqued the “rainbow” through their art that confronted gendered forms of (antiblack) violence and pervaded the visual field with scenes of queer intimacy. Such scenes would later attack the senses and soul of rainbow nationalism, exposing its hypocrisies—the fact that the discourse publicly celebrated progressive pro-LGBTQIA+ legislation while attempting to erase and block such representation from its fruition.³⁵ In *Prismatic Performance* (2020) April Sizemore-Barber offers sharp observations of post-apartheid queer activism and performance, as well as digital queer communities and non-normative kinship structures (Sizemore-Barber 2020). Sizemore-Barber notes the significant contribution of queer artists while attending to the wonders and dangers of both visibility for the Black queer who is stretched simultaneously between invisibility and hypervisibility. The Black queer’s overt entry into the representational field generated a renewed aesthetic language while steering forward a kind of aesthetic opacity suggesting a cognizance of the dangers of readopting problematic tropes associated with representationalism. This was a move away from representationalism’s overemphasis on the power of visibility since visibility also invited scrutiny and danger. Another trouble with representationalism is its creation of Black queer tokens or representatives standing in for the whole of Black queer experience.

The post-apartheid openness to increased queer and feminist aesthetic contemplation has ushered in a repertoire of critical and politicized art-making approaches. There is no consensus among queer South Africans about what the visual can and ought to do. This is discernable in Sizemore-Barber’s discussion of two celebrated white queer drag performers, Steven Cohen and Evita Buzeidenhout, whose work pokes fun at queer antagonism as well as the cruelty and absurdity of white power and color-blind nonracialism. Evita’s “ethnic drag” and Cohen’s “monstrous drag” diverge at the point where Evita’s aesthetic labors toward participation in nonracial democracy while Cohen’s is a deliberate assailment on the normative visual field with an ambivalence to incorporation into nation building. Athi Patra Ruga’s rainbow performances as well as Steven Cohen’s chandelier piece are some of the most successful and well-known public performance interventions working with queer performance tactics in problematic ways. They use a strategic visibility that rests upon adopting predominantly impoverished and working-class Black people as a backdrop for queer aesthetic subversion.³⁶ While enacting performance interventions aimed at aggravating the hetero-normativized sensorium, their use of the township as backdrop ossifies the trope of the Black township dweller as the sole emblem of homophobia. While I concur with Sizemore-Barber’s assessments, I am less confident that “white-transition era performers such as Cohen and Uys have become less visible in an increasingly fractured postapartheid landscape [and that Black queer artists such as FAKA and Umlilo are gaining visibility] in their stead” (Sizemore-Barber 2020). In this statement, there is a discrepancy between deciphering what *is* and what appears to *be*. Whatever forms Black queer aesthetics has taken on, it has not amounted to a supplantation or eclipsing of whiteness and white queer artists or taking roles “in their stead.”

In conclusion, the political role played by aesthetics in anti-apartheid struggle is undeniable, yet the degree of its success remains open for debate. The tethering of (the politics of) art to the ANC constitutional program coaxed aesthetic practitioners to distance their work from revolutionary struggle (making directly political art was criticized by ANC

official Albie Sachs as “using culture as a weapon of struggle”). ANC-aligned aesthetic theories such as Sachs’s expected post-apartheid cultural work to capitulate to the program of the new constitution. This put(s) artists in a compromised position of challenging the rainbow nationalism that also licensed those critiques. Considering Mandela’s speech, Black political representation as Black (performative) agency remains contestable. The question of Black performance continues to wrestle with questions of anti-Blackness’ dissolution under the duress and/or guise of borrowed speech. Studying the machinations of Black speech’s structural silencing and coercion is only the beginning of the creation and/as destruction needed for Black performance/utterance to do things *against* the world.

Notes

- 1 A transcript of Mandela’s speech can be found on the website *Nelson Rolinhlahla Mandela* at: http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1994/940524_sona.htm, accessed on November 16, 2022.
- 2 The massacre occurred on March 21, 1960, when the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and African National Congress (ANC) organized a protest against pass laws outside the Sharpeville police station, the police opened fire and killed 69 Black people, injuring 180 others. Both parties were banned thereafter, leading to more strict surveillance of Black freedom fighters. In the following year, the ANC’s armed wing *Umkhonto Wesizwe* (MK) (translated as Spear of the Nation) was formed. The MK, co-founded by Nelson Mandela, launched attacks in December 1961 and was subsequently banned and classified as a “terrorist organization” by the South African and US governments.
- 3 Transcript of Mandela’s speech.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 This statement can be found on the “Profile of Ingrid Jonker” at the *Presidency of Republic of South Africa* website at: <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/national-orders/recipient/ingrid-jonker-1933–1965>, accessed on November 16, 2022. Mbeki’s speech can be found on “State of the Nation Address of the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki: Houses of Parliament, Cape Town” at the South African Government website at: <https://www.gov.za/state-nation-address-president-south-africa-thabo-mbeki-houses-parliament-cape-town>, accessed on December 3, 2022.
- 6 The Inkatha Freedom Party/African National Congress (IFP/ANC) conflict orchestrated by the government debunked the promise of a “peaceful transition”; on this point see Kynoch (2018). Also see Wilderson (2008).
- 7 “Burying the hatchet/AK47” is Athi Joja’s locution in “Feathers Unfurl, Steel Surrounds,” *Mail & Guardian* (July 4, 2014); available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2014-07-04-feathers-unfurl-steel-surrounds>, accessed on October 6, 2022.
- 8 Wilderson questions in Lacanian thought whether Black positionality can move from “empty speech” to “full speech” like the Lacanian subject. He asks if “Lacanian full speech, wedded as it is to the notion that there is no world to apprehend beyond the realm of signification, adequately theorize those [Black] bodies that emerge from direct relations of force? ... [I]s the logic of full speech too imbricated in the institutionality of anti-Blackness to be descriptively or prescriptively adequate for thinking Black positionality....is full speech for the Master full speech for the Slave?” (Wilderson, 2016).
- 9 Carolyn Hamilton’s profile can be located on the Nelson Mandela Foundation website at: <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/professor-carolyn-hamilton>, accessed on December 18, 2022. Other speech writers for Mandela include Raymond Suttner; see Suttner (2021). On Mandela’s Black speech writer, Garrey Dennie, see Ruland (2015).
- 10 Artists taking these formal directions include Ntombi Gasas, Desiré Davids, Boyzie Cekwana, Jay Pather, Hlengiwe Lushaba Madlala, Nelisiwe Rushualang, Ntando Cele, Nelisiwe Xaba, Sello Phesa, Mlu Zondi, and others.

- 11 See: “Nelson Mandela: Why some young South Africans think he ‘sold out’,” *BBC News* (July 17, 2018), available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-44861138>, accessed on December 18, 2022. Nelisiwe Xaba refers to the “sellout project” in King-Dorset (2016).
- 12 “Terrible improvisation” is a riff on Moten’s use of Charles Mingus’s “terrible beauty” in Moten (2003); this is echoed by Saidiya Hartman in the “Terrible Beauty of the Slum” section in Hartman (2019), 3–10.
- 13 An example of this approach can be located in Cole (2020).
- 14 Consider the Marxian undertones and presuppositions of the concept of work. For Joja (2019), this “preeminence of class consciousness places black people in service of the vaunted class struggle and not the other way around.”
- 15 Achille Mbembe (2004, 374) describes the unlivable conditions and labor practices in colonial and (pre-)apartheid-era Johannesburg portrayed in Cole’s photograph as such: “The main site of this inscription was the black body itself. It could be searched every day at the end of the shift in the mines. It could be stripped naked, required to jump over bars. Hair, nose, mouth, ears, or rectum could be scrutinized with meticulous care. Floggings with a *sjambok* (leather whip) or tent rope, or striking with fists, were the rule.”
- 16 Thomas is a US artist whose oeuvre considers apartheid visibility. An exemplary exhibit that took place in 2014 at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg can be found in *Hank Willis Thomas: History Doesn’t Laugh, 22 February—29 March 2014*; see the Goodman Gallery Website at: <https://www.goodman-gallery.com/exhibitions/383>, accessed on December 20, 2022.
- 17 Jacques Derrida wrote about *Art contre/against Apartheid* (1983), an anti-apartheid exhibit that predicted what a future anti-apartheid exhibit would like since apartheid banned the content such as that shown in *Art contre*. See Derrida (1985).
- 18 Further, Cole (2020) notes evidence of “recurrent police raids on [Athol Fugard’s] company’s rehearsals and performances, multiple arrests and even imprisonments of actors, and intense censorship,” 46.
- 19 Artist and writer David Koloane (1999, 22) notes BCM “was influential in the communities, initiating projects and education programs intended to make them self-reliant.”
- 20 For Koloane (1999, 21): “given the composition of South Africa and its racial policies at the time, the emergence of the ‘township art’ label is easy to understand. White artists based in the suburbs were not referred to as suburban artists, nor was their work referred to as suburban art.” This marker is not collapsible with art from the township.
- 21 Wilderson (2010) makes a distinction between the *culture of politics* and the *politics of culture* and the latter locates politics entirely or predominantly in aesthetic subversion while the former describes culture’s commitment to resistance, culture’s embeddedness in or entanglement with revolutionary political commitments.
- 22 Joja (2019).
- 23 Sachs (1991, 189).
- 24 Mnyele from his unpublished autobiography (1984) as cited in biography of Thamsanqa “Thami” Mnyele on *South African History Online* website (no date or author given) at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/thamsanqa-thami-mnyele>; accessed on January 5, 2023.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Sachs referred to dance when he stated: “When we dance the toyi-toyi we tell the world and ourselves that we are South Africans on the road to freedom. This must be one of the greatest cultural achievements of the ANC, that it has made South Africans of the most diverse origins feel comfortable in its ranks.” Sachs (1991, 189).
- 29 The mudras are defined by Sandra Klopfer as “signs and gestures made with hands and fingers that are said to symbolize the enlightenment and vows of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*.” See Klopfer (2004, 72).
- 30 Ibid.

- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., 73 (italics mine).
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 For example, Arts and Culture Minister Lulu Xingwana expressed a homophobic public response to Zanele Muholi's queer feminist photographic work and Muholi responded in turn; see Cooper (2010).
- 36 Amelia Jones has located and critiqued this tendency in readings of Judith Butler's theory of queer performativity. Jones (2021, 205) posits, "read critically and with hindsight, the tendency in subsequent work to idealize the of-color drag queenery of *Paris is Burning* as overturning gender norms simply extended the problematic and avant-gardist tendency to fetishize those perceived as exotic and marginal as 'subverting' the tropes of European modernism."

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EMBODIMENT/MATERIALITY

Love Songs (to End Hetero-Patriarchal, Settler-Colonial, Extractivism)

Natalie Loveless

To challenge settler-colonial perception requires reorienting the form by which we share knowledge.

(Dylan Robinson 2020a, 15)

“White Capitalist Patriarchy” (how may we name this scandalous Thing?) turns everything into a resource for appropriation, in which an object of knowledge is finally itself only matter for the seminal power, the act, of the knower.

(Donna Haraway 1988)

White seeing takes place from the bird’s-eye view, conceptually and physically, whether in racial hierarchy or from a balloon, plane, helicopter, or drone.

(Nicholas Mirzoeff 2016)

It is Saturday, August 20 and I am in *oskana k̄a-asastēki* (Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada) for the performance-cum-album-launch of Peter and Jimmie’s *Love Songs to End Colonization* (Morin and Kilpatrick 2022). Organized at the Dunlop Art Gallery and curated by Tomas Jonsson (first-generation Canadian; Danish descent), the performance starts with Peter Morin (Crow Clan member of the Tahltan Nation; French Canadian father) and Jimmie Kilpatrick (third-generation Ontarian; Celtic origin) singing four of their karaoke tracks, accompanied by original karaoke videos created during their residency there (August 16–20, 2022).¹ After each track, Morin pauses to address us as participant-witnesses, sharing stories about when and where each emerged as a *Love Song*.

I first encountered Morin’s work through his performance action series, *Cultural Graffiti* (see Figure 13.1)—artistic interventions performed within specifically chosen sites of colonial power and violence.² The actions generally followed this structure: Morin would pilgrimage to a symbolic site, attend to its visual, historical, and material resonances, and choose how to sing to and with the site. Sometimes Morin’s actions would draw unwanted attention; sometimes his actions would draw no attention at all (see Gilbert, Phillipson, and Morin 2015a, 2015b).



FIGURE 13.1 Peter Morin, *Cultural Graffiti: A Tahltan NDN Declares War on the British Monarchy*, Buckingham Palace, London England, 2013. Ashok Mathur.

At each chosen site, Morin would sing, allowing the sound vibrations emerging from his body, as instrument, to bathe the site in a form of aural graffiti designed to trans-mutate the material energies of place, acknowledging histories of displacement, genocide, loss, pain, wound, violence, and betrayal, while at the same time voicing *longing*. Through these actions, Morin not only marked sites of colonial violence and erasure but also, through the alchemical power of voice, worked to cleanse, reshape, and honor these spaces. To move from the extractive logics of non-agential objecthood, a perspective endemic to hetero-patriarchal, settler-colonial ways of being and doing, to those of relational-material being and doing congruent with Indigenous worldviews and land-based knowledges.

Almost ten years later, I am perched against a garbage can on a sidewalk in front of the Dunlop Art Gallery, participating in Peter and Jimmie's 2022 *Love Songs to End Colonization*.

The first seeds of Peter and Jimmie's *Love Songs* were planted in 2005, during a performance called *I Grieve Too Much* at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia.³ Morin was invited to perform at the Museum of Anthropology as part of Vancouver's *New Forms* festival and, in response, he asked himself and his community, "What have you never seen in a museum? And what do you *want* to see in a museum?" After sitting with the responses to these questions, he asked if he could perform in the part of the collection where Tahltan "objects" (kin) were being incarcerated (see Robinson 2020b). Morin recounts, "The objects are singing. But you can't hear them because of the glass. I want to be in the collection where Tahltan kin are being kept and sing so loud that my voice will be heard. *Their* voices will be heard."⁴

On the evening of May 12, 2005, in the Tahltan corner of the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology, surrounded by Tahltan kin, Morin sang Richie Haven's version of "Fire and Rain" as loud as he could.⁵ With grief heavy inside, he sang for his Indigenous kin, human and non. With this action, Morin called on a love song from his youth—one that he had turned to for solace after the death of his grandmother, Dinah—as a way to materialize hurt, care, desire, longing, pain, and loss both on his own behalf and on behalf of loved ones.⁶

Between 2005 and 2018, Morin repeatedly found himself, during performances at symbolic sites of colonial power and genocide, turning to love songs. These love-song-actions, *Love Songs to Colonization* (see Figure 13.2), emerged as a way to try to hold the pain and contradiction of Indigenous embodiment within the ever-present experience of colonial violence and genocide.⁷ As he told the crowd gathered for the launch of *Love Songs to End Colonization* on August 20, 2022: "I started singing as a way to try to understand why my



FIGURE 13.2 Peter Morin and Jimmie Kilpatrick, *Love Songs to End Colonization* album cover, 2022. Ashok Mathur.

body was hurting so much in this place called Canada. I found myself singing pop songs. The language of emotions helps to articulate my body in this place. I am not only singing the pop songs but am being *helped* by these songs. Helped to negotiate and feel my body in this space.”⁸

After having performed approximately twenty-two *Love Songs to Colonization* between 2005 and 2018, Morin realized that it was time for *Love Songs to Colonization* to become *Love Songs to End Colonization*.⁹ This grammatical shift, and the exchange that led up to it, reoriented his practice from an individual act, witnessed within the frame of art and mobilizing the structural power of performance art to enable anticolonial intervention, to collective song as an act of exuberant solidarity and protest.¹⁰ And this was what, on August 20, 2022, in the noon sun in front of the Dunlop, I was (in Bracha Ettinger’s terms) wit(h)nessing (see Ettinger 2001, 69; Boscacci 2018).¹¹

I am listening to Peter singing Yusuf Islam’s (Cat Stevens’s) 1967 “The First Cut is the Deepest.”¹² The song resonates. It lodges inside me. I end up humming it for days. The first cut is the deepest. It is. But according to one of my teachers, the first cut is also the one that only appears in the context of repetition (Freud 1920/1961). Trauma only lodges (i.e. becomes meaningful) through repetition. The first encounter (first contact) is unassimilable. It doesn’t make sense. It is illegible. At least in sf novels.¹³ Definitely in psychoanalytic circles. And, it seems, in colonial contexts too.

In other words, the first cut is the deepest retroactively. You can’t call it the “deepest” if there is nothing to compare it to. Later cuts are needed. Or: The first cut may be the deepest, but this is only realizable in retrospect. The first cut is the first cut. Shocked, we don’t realize we are cut. Until we do.

I can’t feel this song or sing it the way Peter does—or Jimmie does—as I watch them, singing in beaded jean jackets (by Saga Kwandibens, <https://www.instagram.com/beadworkbysaga/>). I don’t know their cuts. I know the violence of intra-settler fighting. I know the

confusion of childhood sexual violence. I know the cuts of identity confusion. Of coming out. I probably know a few other cuts. But not theirs. And not yours.

“Let’s end colonization in Canada!”

“We all need to sing together to end colonization in Canada!”

“Let’s end Canada!”

Peter shouts into the mic. Folx join in and sing karaoke love songs together and to each other.

Sound vibrations.

Collective resonance.

We laugh. We hoot.

We are in the streets of Regina, in front of the gallery, under swaying trees.

We *are* the streets of Regina.

Others stop and look at the posters announcing *Love Songs to End Colonization* and the t-shirts bearing the words “Love Songs,” which we (anyone) are given as we sing, performing all together (Figure 13.3).¹⁴

After a bit, Morin steps up to the mic and says “I will let you in on the trick. The trick is: the songs aren’t the love songs to end colonization ... we are the love songs.

The ancestors are reminding us that WE are the LOVE SONGS.”¹⁵



FIGURE 13.3 Peter Morin and Jimmie Kilpatrick, *Love Songs to End Colonization*; t-shirts available in exchange for participation in the performance action, 2022. T-shirt artwork by Veronica Wachter. Photo by Mika Abbott.

is both a call to situated accountability and a political performative—though admittedly one that too often occurs as what Sara Ahmed has distinguished as a *nonperformative* that, consciously or not, works to perpetuate the very violences that it claims to redress (Ahmed 2019a, and 2019b). At its most interesting and worthwhile—in its *felicitous* performative articulation—to make a treaty acknowledgment, as a settler, is to engage (sometimes messily) in marking what Indigenous sound studies scholar Dylan Robinson calls a critical listening positionality (Robinson 2020a, 62). When genuinely engaged in by non-Indigenous folx, it articulates something I’ve started to call “settler-grappling”—a practice of situated, emergent, located, and relational enmeshment within networks of inheritance and commitment that matter at *this* moment, in *this* place, and that trace response-abilities to land and site. It is never pro-forma. When articulated with heart, acknowledging the genocide that led to my body being on these lands, in the ways that it currently is, becomes, in this context, a performative act, with “performative” taken in its most capacious and response-able sense.¹⁹ It is to take a moment to think, and rethink; to look, and look again; to listen situatedly; to speak, and in that speaking articulate networks of influence, debt, and care that make up *the now, in relation*. And it is to do so in a way that renders those extractive instrumentalizing logics that govern our fields and institutions (despite our wishing or working for things to be otherwise) nonsensical.

Robinson’s book *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* suggests, as noted in the opening epigraph, that “to challenge settler-colonial perception requires reorienting the *form by which we share knowledge*” (Robinson 2020a, 15; emphasis added).²⁰ The university, Robinson persuasively demonstrates, is a regulatory structure organized by “hungry” listening. There is a hunger built into the system designed to leave everyone—especially those who are more precarious, but even those in positions of privilege—feeling at risk, unsafe, and in need. To leave them *starving*. To be starving is a particularly desperate hunger, a survival-based hunger. It is a hunger that is, metaphorically and materially, constitutive of those universities, communities, and relationships governed by settler-colonial, petro-capitalist, hetero-patriarchal worldviews—worldviews that we see increasingly amplified in moments of social and ecological crisis. The hunger Robinson names can be noted at the institutional level, as faculty are pitted against each other for merit increases and the decimation of tenure-track hiring leads to overwhelming amounts of precarious labor. It is also visible in many classrooms, in teaching and learning spaces that, no matter how alternative we get with our methods, are still necessarily oriented by the economic logic of the “A.” The system ensures that they/we are hungry for it—for the gold; for the A.

As Robinson explains, the concept “hungry listening” comes from the halq’è-mèylem term for settlers arriving on Turtle Island (Coast Salish territory) during the gold rush, “*xwelitém*,” which named settlers as “starving ones” (Robinson 2020a, 2, 48).²¹ The starvation Robinson indexes is both physical and ideological; the settlers arriving on boats were both malnourished and in need of physical sustenance, and they hungered for gold—extractive, capitalist wealth and all that it promised those engaged in conquest and Western expansion. Drawing on this etymology, to be a “hungry listener” is to be extractively, economically goal oriented. To listen “hungrily” is to listen for content as if its form were a neutral vehicle. It is to be constituted by a drive to accumulate knowledge and translate everything, like the commodity form, to the same common denominator. Extractive and possessive, hungry listening is structured by *use* and not *encounter*. By translatability and not sovereignty.²²

One of the things that Robinson works to do in his text is to distinguish “hungry” from “guest” listening. To listen as a guest is a *relation* rather than goal-oriented practice; it is the opposite of hungry listening. Guest listening opens itself up, modestly, vulnerably, and curiously to the specificities of place and people (human and non), asking questions without assuming what the answer to those questions will yield. In articulating this perspective, Robinson invites us to recognize the limits of analogical thinking (which values the terms of sameness over difference) and, instead, to listen *in relation with* other knowledge systems

that cannot be assimilated, translated, or equalized/neutralized (Robinson 2020a, 51, 64–65).²³ The point here is that analogic thinking, when engaged uncritically, fails to account for *incommensurability*.

Some differences are sovereign.

Not ours, by right.

And that “right” is not specified *avant-la-lettre*, in an essentialist-capitalist manner. It is specified *in relation*, situatedly. Granted in and with *community*.

In this context, I propose the following: Contemporary art in a global framework requires a focus on the radically local and situated, articulated at an onto-epistemological angle from field-specific discourses of context and site-specificity. The global of the global art market is, in principle and by dint of being market-oriented, the *opposite* of situated, respectful, frameworks that recognize the sovereignty of *the local*, the sovereignty of *the land*, and the specificity of practices accountable to and in respectful relation with place and community.

Wit(h)nessing Situated Knowledge

I “hate” Theater.

After a long and traumatic (I don’t use the term lightly) love affair with the field of professional theater, I left. I was in my mid-twenties. I thrashed about a bit, looking for a new home. I flirted with the work of Augusto Boal, with Peter Brooks, with guerilla street theater, and even with directing. None of it stuck. Instead, I started painting. Went to a Museum School. And fell in love with body-based, action-based, and durational performance art.

I “love” performance art.

As I went on to be trained in art history and theory as well as performance studies, what I was taught was the following (tried and true, and so engrained as to be banal, even as it is challenged in the field):

Theater = bad.

Performance art = good.

What is at the core of this disciplinary allergy? The Proscenium. That arch: that divide constitutive of the fourth wall, broken or not. A resonant (rather than consumptive-analogic) articulation, I realized later, of what Haraway (1988, 581) calls the god trick, of what Mirzoeff (2023) calls white sight, of what Robinson (2020a, 10) distinguishes as Settler Forms of Perception.

That said, despite myself, recently, and after decades, I found myself falling—with the surprise and magic and discomfort that often accompanies such experiences—in love (again) with theater.

And the experience had everything to do with that hated proscenium.

It was early May 2022. The production was called *As You Like It: A Radical Retelling* by Cliff Cardinal (Oglala Lakota Nation).²⁴ Riffing on the trope of deception and the role of the fool in the forest of Arden, Cardinal’s “radical retelling”—and indeed, it was constitutively radical in the etymological sense—took the form of a treaty acknowledgement.

The entire thing.

Ninety minutes.

And it was glorious.

Satiric, barbed, moving, irreverent, and direct, I felt alive in that Proscenium Theater with its red velvet curtains and raked seating for the first time in decades. It

may even be the most alive theatrical feeling I've felt in my body since that moment when I was nine years old and I experienced a theatrical production for the very first time. Politics and passion. The encounter felt urgent, present, situated, and, most importantly for me in this context, it took the Proscenium as form and rendered it a necessary political core of the work. The theatrical event worked precisely because of the way it mobilized the colonial inheritance and structural logics of the space, at the level of its morphological as well as cultural affordances, and it did so not only in the mode of public address, but, dramaturgically, in the mode of implication. Cardinal caught us all in his crosshairs and refused to let us go. It was tough. It was raw. It was loving. And it was a raging cry—a manifesto and a call-in—for accountable, response-able, situated, complex, uncertain, and sometimes uncomfortable, guest listening. It was, in its own way, a love song that we were asked to wit(h)ness.

For those of us in and around the worlds of art history, theory, and practice (artistic and curatorial), the question of the global looms large. It looms as an ongoing and variable nod to the decolonizing and decentering of the historical Euro-Western focus of the field—those survey-logics that rearticulate a colonizing “civilizing” drive—as well as an invitation for each of us, differentially positioned, to consider the multiple inheritances of the discipline itself, in and as they articulate themselves in our local, national, institutional, and disciplinary contexts. Sometimes, this articulates itself as an inclusionist paradigm, inviting other knowledges and perspectives to have a seat at the table. Other times, it occurs as an invitation to question the work of the field as it articulates itself in our classrooms, biennials, galleries, and publications. And sometimes, it emerges as the practice of treaty acknowledgment that, though addressing itself to accountability in relation to land and place, too often, occurs as virtue-signaling performed in the context of settler-anxiety. Too often, as Robinson notes and as is key to the thinking Amelia Jones and Jane Chin Davidson have gathered in this volume, these approaches function, often despite themselves, to re-center Euro-Western settler-colonial logics. They do this by offering shifts in *content* but not in *form*.

At a slight angle from these orientations, I am working through the question of the global from the perspective of the *radically relationally situated* as articulated within the Indigenous and antiracist feminist thinking that surrounds and nurtures me (see Igloliorte, Nagam, and Taunton 2016; Igloliorte and Taunton 2017; Morgan 2017; Nelson 2019, amongst others). At this moment, my wager is that art in a global context—that is, in the context of a world in crisis, a world in social and ecological collapse—must be addressed in ways that reorganize what we pay attention to and *how*. In this respect, Donna Haraway's (1988) essay “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” is germinal, in that it articulates something through its titular distinction—situated knowledges—from which I have drawn inspiration for decades.²⁵ I suppose this makes my chapter also a love song to Donna. It is a love song to everything she taught me. Donna taught me that love comes *first*. In the writing, in the classroom, in the world. Intergenerationally resonant, situated knowledging is a practice of loving response-ably.

The first thing to understand about this well-circulated essay is that situated knowledges are not simply about located practice: they are not just about a politics of location, nor are they synonymous with standpoint theory (though Haraway does speak to these perspectives). Situated knowledges are *not simply situated and located* but, in their situated locatedness, they are understood as always already partial. Situated knowledges emerge from research practices that are located and acknowledged *in their plural partiality*, rendering the knowledge at stake contestable and always already situated within communities of practice and discourse. Secondly, while situated knowledge, as a critical practice, demands that the located be understood as partial, and that this partiality be understood as an ethical

requirement in that it facilitates response-ability for where one is speaking from and how, this knowledge modality, its discursivity, is *always already tied to a world in motion*—what Haraway understands as the material-semiotic. Situated knowledge is relationally constituted in rhizomatic resonance. This leads us to Haraway’s necessary point: in situated knowledges it is *not only the human who speaks*. Indeed, as Morin’s work highlights, it is not only the human who *sings*. It is not only the human who *loves*.

Kin are everywhere.

Yes, *rocks are people too*.

To think art history, criticism, theory, and practice in this context is to question the object(s) of our intertwined fields, and the methods we develop to be accountably in relation with these objects.²⁶ It requires taking seriously the objectifying and carceral logics of The Colonial Museum and the insidious pull of the god trick and its logics (aka heteropatriarchal, settler-colonial, extractivist) within our institutional systems of analysis, pedagogy, dissemination, and reproduction.²⁷ Indeed, the god trick is endemic to “objective” writings of art’s histories—something the new art history and its siblings and progeny have worked to dismantle and remodel for decades.²⁸

The god trick names the “ideologically objective”—the fantasy of a view from above, of everything and everywhere from nowhere (Haraway 1988, 581). It is the view that, by erasing the context and means of production from its frame, gives us the infamous blue marble (eloquently analyzed by visual cultural scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff (2016) in his book *How to See the World*), which, in its charismatic formulation, is said to have sparked the environmentalist movement and the very first Earth Day. This “view of infinite vision,” however, Haraway reminds us, “is an illusion” that may work well to produce charismatic images such as the blue marble but is a “particularly bad guide to how scientific knowledge is actually made” (Haraway 1988, 581, 576). It is also a particularly bad guide for knowledge production in general—be it scientific, humanistic, artistic, or all of these and more at once. This is because the god trick is a perspectivalization that, in its stance as totality, “loses track of its mediations just where someone might be held *responsible*” (Haraway 1988, 579; emphasis added).

Why does this matter? What is response-ability here? And crucially, how might it inflect the terms of accountability that are so urgent at this moment of truth? Of (re)conciliation? Of (un)doing the (un)mattering of lives rendered object under the white supremacist gaze? These are questions that must be asked in site and context, in place and community, ongoingly and responsively. These are questions that, in Haraway’s terms, work toward “a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others’ practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions” (Haraway 1988, 579).

A more adequate, richer, better account of art in a global framework. How to write this? Situatedly?

Iteratively?

Non-formulaically?

Bringing body and spirit to page?

How to reframe those colonial logics that pull toward proof and contestation at the level of the writing itself? How to challenge disembodiment and the seductive armor of the phallogocentric-objective?

In this chapter, I move back and forth. I write from my heart. I also write in academic ways that pull toward a kind of authority that my position and training facilitate. The question of how to inhabit such modalities without misrecognizing them, while working to nurture capacious spaces or care in the academy is ongoing for me.

Acknowledging the agency of art within our sites of analysis and engagement requires something different of us as art writers. It requires responsive, situated-and-thereby-accountable readings and writings *with* art rather than readings and writings *on* or *about* art. Here, and in the context of any and all attempts to address and redress harm, situated knowledgings,

To write *with* rather than *on* or *about* is a formal and methodological requirement for art historians and theorists interested in what is at the heart of the calls to render art history “global” or “decolonize” and “decenter” art history. This is necessary to address the history of white supremacy, colonial conquest, and the creation of the world (critters, elements, people) as object available for extraction and exchange in a global market that is at the very heart of the field of contemporary art. And while it might seem to some that performance art is at an angle from the commodity circuit, the pull to objectify that about which one is writing is just as rife in performance art writing as writing about painting or installation or sculpture or print media. This is not to call the field(s) out. It is simply to acknowledge and name constitutive elements of the worlds in which we live and operate. Or rather, the worlds I live in and have been raised in and shaped by. The ways I have been disciplined into the disciplines of art theory, criticism, and history. The textures of their contestations, and the joys of their pedagogy and practice. It is to name—with Vanessa Machado de Oliveira in my ears—the field’s *modernity* and work to hospice it.

De Oliveira (2021), in the book *Hospicing Modernity*, invites us to take up the perspectives of death doula and hospice worker when it comes to inhabiting the university and its adjacent spaces as they attempt to articulate anticolonial commitments. To approach hetero-patriarchal, settler-colonial extractivism from such a (trauma-informed) perspective is to work with love *methodologically*. It is to engage colonialism as agent, not object, and, with love, to support it in having a *good death*—with the understanding that the concept of good death is antithetical to the extractive, progress-and-immortality driven ways of being that condition modernity.

Morin’s work, like de Oliveira’s (and Cardinal’s, and, indeed, Robinson’s, Mirzoeff’s, and Haraway’s) calls for love as a radical act of transformation. To write with Morin’s work, in conversation and care, requires me to frame the question of the work of art—or *art working*—in a global framework, *as a practice of situated, relational attunement*. In Robinson’s terms, of *quest* rather than *hungry* listening (Robinson 2020a, 37–76). Of relational, excitable, mutually constitutive listening that works at an angle from what Mirzoeff (2023) distinguishes as “white sight.” Indeed, it requires cultivating practices of non-white-sight, or, to turn from noun to verb, of non-white-*seeing*. If whiteness, in this context, is both an ideology and a practice, and if my body counts as a body of privilege here and now in ways that it wouldn’t have in other places and times, and may not again, then yes: white sight can be undone. It can be un-learned.

It is this (un)learning that I crave for the project of de-, anti-, and counter- colonial art writing in the context of contemporary Indigenous, antiracist, and queer-feminist thought in and around the settler-academies of Turtle Island. So, I will continue to ask: What might response-ability look like, at the level of form, in our institutions and on our pages and through our voices? This is the question of this chapter, the answers to which *must* be ongoingly, differentially, incommensurably, iteratively, and situationally articulated within communities of practice and accountability, together, and with love.

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Notes

- 1 Personal identifications are worded as given to me by Peter, Jimmie, and Tomas, and follow each of their preferences.
- 2 *Cultural Graffiti* was first developed and performed when Morin was a research fellow at Royal Holloway University (June 2013). While there, he worked with Dylan Robinson (at University of British Columbia, then at Queen's University) and Helen Gilbert (Royal Holloway) to develop a practice of sonic intervention—or “voice marking”—designed to cleanse symbolic colonial sites with “Tahltan Nation power” (personal communication with the author, September 5, 2022). In London, these included tourist sites (the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, and the Tower of London), INDIGENOUS monuments (Pocahontas's gravesite and Kwakwaka'wakw carver Mungo Martin's Totem Pole in Great Windsor Park), and contemporary pilgrimage sites (such as the Diana Memorial Fountain in Hyde Park). Morin also performed these actions in the United States and Canada at sites such as Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, the Washington Monument in the United States, and the “Indian Head” statue in Indian Head Saskatchewan.
- 3 *I Grieve Too Much* was developed for Vancouver's New Forms Festival in 2005. *Love Songs* officially launched in 2009 with “High Flying Bird” (Ritchie Havens) for *12 Making Objects AKA FIRST NATIONS DADA* at Open Space Artist Run Centre, Victoria, British Columbia.
- 4 Personal communication, September 5, 2022.
- 5 Morin recalls: “I was located with the Tahltan ancestor artworks. It was down the hall. I was mic'd up also. The performance starts with the acknowledgement (something like) that on this day, in our territory, at the place that is known as the sacred headwaters, 13 elders and youth land protectors were arrested protecting the land from Imperial Shell Oil Canada” (email communication, December 3, 2022).
- 6 In Morin's words: “[t]he song made me feel safe enough to be able to do the performance. the song, and his [Haven's] singing, was a guide for how to be safe enough in that museum space, a space that can be so damaging” (email communication, September 22, 2022). In a later email (December 3, 2022) Morin writes: “my grandmother passed onto the other side camp in 1997. I found that album—Richie Havens' Greatest Hits—in my first year of art school (1996). That song. The words. his voice. Helped me to grieve. It was a place of power-full-ness. I needed to reach inside that bentwood box and pull out that CD Walkman for all of the reasons and because you put your sacred objects in those boxes. That song was a sacred object to me. It gave me life again.”
- 7 Personal communication, August 20, 2022.
- 8 Spoken during the album-launch-performance at the Dunlop Art Gallery, August 20, 2022.
- 9 Crucially, this realization was not ex nihilo. It emerged from a challenge that artists Ayumi Goto and Peter Claire put to Morin about colonization/decolonization. Specifically, Claire asked, “What if colonization never happened here in these territories, what would [your] ancestors have made?” In turn, Goto, with whom Morin works regularly, invited him to reflect on the *centering* of colonization as love object, in the desire to sing love songs to colonization, and what might happen if this object shifted from colonization to its *end*. How might *that* change the project? Rather than one supplanting the other, *Love Songs to Colonization* and *Love Songs to End Colonization* each “inspires/enables/activates the other” (email communication December 3, 2022).
- 10 *Love Songs to End Colonization* was developed collaboratively by Morin, with Kilpatrick and Jonsson, after Jonsson invited Morin to perform as part of a fundraiser for *Mountain Standard Time* in 2016. Modelled on the “a-thon” fundraisers of Jonsson's youth, performance artists were invited to do durational works that could be sponsored by the hour. Morin

reached out to colleague and friend Kilpatrick, and they put together a band—Jesse Carlson (pedal steel guitar), Crystal White (upright bass), Jimmie Kilpatrick (drums), and Peter Morin (vocals)—to perform “Not the Loving Kind,” by Buffy Sainte Marie, over and over again, to a wheat field in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada, where Morin and Kilpatrick were living and working at the time. Morin recalls: “This song. The words. We sang it for hours. In the spirit of Ragnar [Kjartansson]. To the wheat field. To the ancestors. Because they also need hear Queen Buffy’s music. It needed to be an empty wheat field at a farmstead. Also, I wanted to see how the song would change inside of my body if we played it for hours. I wanted to see if we could free the land again because we played this song for that duration” (personal communication, September 9, 2022).

- 11 With her work on the “matrixial” as a proto-symbolic realm, Ettinger provides a feminist rereading of the Lacanian theory of the subject that functions to highlight the structural phallogocentrism and anthropocentrism of Lacan’s model, while working *with* and *alongside* Lacan’s insights. She respectfully (though undutifully) reads and contributes to the Lacanian oeuvre, rerouting some of its tendrils. The neologism “wit(h)nessing” acknowledges relation *as the smallest unit* rather than relation as a secondary formation.
- 12 Written by Yusuf Islam, “The First Cut Is the Deepest” was first recorded by African-American recording artist P. P. Arnold in May of 1967. Islam’s own version came out seven months later, in December 1967.
- 13 Everything I know about science fiction I learned from Sha LaBare (2010). Many scholars in the field prefer sf to Sci-Fi. Among the reasons scholars in the field prefer sf is that it is more expansive. sf = speculative fiction, encompassing not just “hard sci-fi” but fantasy, Le Guin’s social speculations, etc., and the latter is sometimes used in a derogatory manner, to distinguish high sf from lower, more popular forms. With Haraway (2016), whose thinking is also guided by LaBare’s work, I enjoy the other possible meanings of this acronym: science fantasy, speculative feminism, structural fabulation, string figures, sonic futurism, and so far. See Haraway (2016, 2, 213 n8). Of course, the use of sf predates my coming across it through LaBare and Haraway. For example, see the definition of sf from Merrill (1959).
- 14 T-shirt artwork by Veronica Wachter.
- 15 Spoken during the album-launch-performance at the Dunlop Art Gallery, August 20, 2022.
- 16 At the time of writing, “folx” is used to signal the inclusion, within the grouping indexed, of those difference often marginalized from white, heteropatriarchal, settler-colonial ideological perspectives. I like using it as a default term, given that I am often not present to the many axes of difference that surround me in public space.
- 17 My sister, Stephanie Loveless, and I are travelers in similar fields. We are often confused for each other, and we also both write our way through kinship and family and childhood experiences in the context of antiracist and anti-colonial feminist commitments. I learn and think with her daily, but my self narrative, even as it shifts and calibrates, is never fully aligned with hers. Though sisters, our experiences, modes of self-identification, and sense-making practices differ, and we talk about this regularly. I am brought back to a formative essay in my education: Ian Haney Lopez discusses his mode of identifications (with the Lopez side) versus his brother’s (with the Haney side) in Lopez (1994).
- 18 Erin Morton shares her grappling with and rejection of the term Turtle Island in the preface to her edited volume *Unsettling Canadian Art History*. She writes, “[w]hile this term gets casually tossed around by white settler writers in particular, it has an Anishinaabeg etymology that spans millennia ... However, many Indigenous writers and critics from territories that encompass the land mass that settlers know as North America (typically understood as the settler states of Canada, the US, and Mexico but which can also encompass the Caribbean and Central America) make it clear that ‘Turtle Island’ is a specific creation story for Anishinaabeg people that should not be casually appropriated by non-Anishinaabeg people.

Like many Indigenous terms, ‘Turtle Island’ on non-Indigenous, and particularly on white settler, lips has become shorthand for what Métis scholar Chelsea Vowel regards as ‘cheeky settlers’ seeking ‘to position themselves as more aware.’ Chelsea Vowel (@apihtawikosisân), ‘I don’t use the term Turtle Island,’ Twitter, 23 May 2018, 8:03 p.m., <https://twitter.com/apihtawikosisan/status/999437362013745152>” (Morton 2022, xii–xiii). For the time being I am staying with the term Turtle Island, but, inspired by Morton, I am getting into conversation and thinking on it and may shift this in the future. I also, in the context of the teachings of Dwayne Donald, a colleague and Canada Research Chair in Reimagining Teacher Education with INDIGENOUS Wisdom Traditions at the University of Alberta, am reconsidering my use of the term “settler” as a self-identifier. I have learned to inhabit its modes of signification and learned from the field of settler colonial studies and have found both to be transformative. At the same time, I take to heart Dwayne’s teachings. As one of his students, Lisa Howell, writes, “[a]fter conversations with Dwayne, I have also moved away from describing people of European descent, including myself, as ‘settlers’ or ‘white people.’ As Dwayne taught me, these terms perpetuate division and promote an ideology that does not help us live together as relatives” (Howell 2022, xiii).

- 19 I recast “responsible” as “response-able” here in homage to Donna Haraway, who asks us to reinfect responsibility from a narrative of duty and obligation to one of ethical capacity articulated *in relation*, see Haraway (2003)
- 20 Robinson further specifies that “to decolonize perception in general, and listening in particular, requires different strategies for settler and Indigenous listeners” (2020a, 72). This, along with the footnote where he makes a claim for shifting colonial disciplinary curricula as the pedagogical equivalent of land-back (2020a, 271), is one of my favorite moments in the text. He makes the same argument in Robinson (2018).
- 21 In Robinson’s text, the specific phrasing “Starving Ones” is from a quotation from Carlson (2010, 48)—capitals in the original; Robinson (2020b, 2, 48) uses the phrase “starving person.”
- 22 My thinking on sovereignty, here, is drawn from not only Robinson’s work, but also his generative thinking with Métis artist and scholar David Garneau. See Garneau (2012).
- 23 When Robinson discusses analogical thinking here, he is citing Richard Rath.
- 24 *William Shakespeare’s As You Like It, A Radical Retelling*, written and created by Cliff Cardinal, Nancy Power Theatre at the Roxy, Edmonton, Alberta, May 26, 2022.
- 25 Importantly, the essay articulates something through its titular distinction—situated knowledges—that has proven to be at the core of Haraway’s extensive and far-reaching contributions in the decades since its publication.
- 26 The practice of rendering a term “sous rature” (“under erasure,” Derrida’s term for a Heideggarian practice) points to it as an inadequate yet necessary signifier. See Spivak (1967, xiv).
- 27 On The Colonial Museum, in addition to Robinson’s important work, see Furniss (1999); Hicks (2020); McTavish (2021); Igloiorte and Taunton (2023). When it comes to the logics of the god trick, Haraway (1988) writes, “any status as agent in the production of knowledge must be denied the object. It—the world—must, in short, be objectified as a thing. ... The world,” however, Haraway tells us, “resists being reduced to mere resource” (592, 596). In sum: “The codes of the world are not still, waiting only to be read. The world is not raw material for humanization” (593).
- 28 A contested term for shifts in art historical knowledge production beginning in the aftermath of WWII, blossoming in the 1960s/1970s, and becoming institutionalized in the 1980s/1990s, the New Art History centered insights from critical race theory, feminist theory, sexuality studies, semiotics, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and Marxism (amongst others) in the work of analysing artistic production, dissemination, and debate. See Rees and Borzello (1986); Harris (2001).
- 29 On purity, see Shotwell (2016) On cancel culture within transformative justice movements see Brown (2020) and Thom (2019).
- 30 My grandmother has a story of some of my father’s clothes being set on fire by some “local hooligans” because he was Jewish. When I asked for confirmation from my dad,

he told me: “This is a story Sadie related, though it is likely she dramatized it. When she told me much later about some kids trying to light us on fire with matches because we were Jews, I could recall nothing. But there was some harassment, which she took it seriously enough to start taking us to Church. I can still remember being there and the collection plate being circulated” (email correspondence, December 1, 2022).

- 31 “Such Great Heights,” is track 11 on *Garden State (Music from the Motion Picture)*, Epic Records, 2004. In my younger days, I would listen to albums on repeat, singing along at full voice. It would become the resonance of that moment. In Sadie’s final months, I was listening to the soundtrack to the movie *Garden State*. The song “Such Great Heights” still brings me back to a spot in her little apartment. She is hovering behind my right shoulder. I am with her.
- 32 “Sadie,” is track 4 on *The Milk-Eyed Mender* by Joanna Newsom, Drag City, 2004. This song was a gift from my sister. She is the musician in the family. She played it for me, and for us in our sadness.

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Politics/Public Sphere

REVOLUTION

Revolution is a Circle

Tatiana Flores

Perhaps no other concept has been more closely associated with modernity, modernism, and the avant-garde than revolution. Conventional wisdom tells us that the modern world was birthed by so-called revolutions in industry, technology, and thought, as well as by armed conflicts and the overthrow of old (European) regimes. Indeed, the connotations of “revolution” as both actual political overthrow and metaphor for visionary development are often interwoven. According to British historian Eric Hobsbawn, “the revolution which broke out between 1789 and 1848 ... forms the greatest transformation in human history” (Fischer 2006, 360). Within this narrative, the familiar frameworks of linear teleology, developmentalism, and progress that characterize “modernity” find their natural habitat. German political philosopher Hannah Arendt’s analysis of revolution also links the innovative and the political, stating, “[o]nly when this pathos of novelty is present and where novelty is connected with the idea of freedom are we entitled to speak of revolution” (Arendt 1990, 34). Her assessment, like Hobsbawn’s, foregrounds the history of the West as a normative standard. While Hobsbawn sees the French Revolution as the point of departure, however, Arendt sets an earlier starting date: 1776. She celebrates the (US) American Revolution for having initiated a new social order: “the conviction that life on earth might be blessed with abundance rather than cursed with scarcity” (Arendt 1990, 22). Bucking the disregard of the American Revolution by European thinkers, Arendt posits that “the American colonial experience ... [set] the stage ... for revolutions in the modern sense of a complete change of society” (Arendt 1990, 22–23).

Arendt’s celebration of the United States as “the symbol of a society without poverty” is astounding from the vantage point of the present, where it should not be possible to overlook Indigenous genocide and Black enslavement as the underpinnings of a country founded on settler colonialism and white supremacy.¹ She frames her analysis of the American Revolution as a provocation to those who have overlooked its significance, writing, “facts are stubborn; they do not disappear when historians or sociologists refuse to learn from them, though they may when everybody has forgotten them. In our case, such oblivion would not be academic; it would literally spell the end of the American Republic” (Arendt 1990, 25). Arendt, however, is also guilty of historical erasure, neglecting to include the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) as a topic of analysis in her book-length study

on revolution (see Gaffney 2018; Gines 2014).² The oblivion she describes as having fatal consequences has indeed had deleterious effects on the nation of Haiti, from its foundation to the present day. To protect its hard-won liberty, Haiti had to indemnify France for its lost “property,” incurring an unpayable debt and causing the newly formed republic irreparable harm. Following the lead of the United States, the new Latin American republics in the regions—whose own independence was in some cases indebted to Haiti—isolated the island, refusing it diplomatic and economic relations. Extreme poverty, malnutrition, public health calamities, environmental catastrophes, infrastructural precarity, intergenerational trauma, migratory crises, and long-rooted anti-Blackness mark the lives of many Haitians, but the average person is unaware of the historical circumstances that created Haiti’s current conditions.³ This blind spot has been a historiographical leitmotif, leading pioneering Haitian-American anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot to characterize the Haitian Revolution as “unthinkable,” in the sense that it did not fit into Western conceptions of history and self, where only white people (men) could be protagonists. In his words, “the unthinkable is that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, that which perverts all answers because it defies the terms under which the questions were phrased” (Trouillot 2015, 82). Sybille Fischer confirms, “[o]ne of the most extraordinary events of the history of the black diaspora has ... been banished from the records of history and the circuits of world civilizations,” and facetiously comments, “[i]gnoring slavery and colonialism may produce certain gaps in the historiographical record, but it will not lead to any fundamental misconceptions. The history of the West can be written without them” (Fischer 2006, 362, 363).

The treatment of the Haitian Revolution—a “new beginning” if there ever was one—as a “non-event” in the eyes of European and Euro-descendant thinkers aligns with the biases inherent to mainstream theorizations of the avant-garde.⁴ Black scholars spanning from Trouillot to David Scott, Paul Gilroy, Charles Mills, Denise Murrell, and many others have repeatedly contested the exclusion of Black and other colonized peoples from the discourse of modernity. As Gilroy writes:

[a] concept of modernity that is worth its salt ought, for example, to have something to contribute to an analysis of how the particular varieties of radicalism articulated through the revolts of enslaved people made selective use of the ideologies of the western Age of Revolution and then flowed into social movements of an anti-colonial and decidedly anti-capitalist type (Gilroy 1993, 44).

Enlightenment philosophy exhibited, in the words of philosopher and intellectual historian Susan Buck-Morss, a “glaring discrepancy between thought and practice” (Buck-Morss 2000, 821). She continues, “[t]he exploitation of millions of colonial slave laborers was accepted as part of the given world by the very thinkers who proclaimed freedom to be man’s natural state and inalienable right” (Buck-Morss 2000, 822). G.W.F. Hegel, considered a primary architect of the discourse of modernity, developed his famous “master-slave” dialectic (see Hegel 1977, 111–118) contemporaneously to the Haitian Revolution, but his analysis “falls silent at this point of realization” (Buck-Morss 2000, 848).⁵ Discussing the discourse on Hegel around this topic, Fischer points to philosopher Alexandre Kojève as an outlier among scholars for his critical approach. He considered that the enslaved were “objectively destined to carry out the ‘revolutionary overcoming of the World’” (Fischer 2006, 369). Fischer sums up Kojève’s position thusly: “the future belongs to the revolutionary slave” (Fischer 2006, 369).

Cedric J. Robinson, a seminal scholar of Black Studies and critical race theory in the United States, confronts another European thinker inextricably associated with revolution, Karl Marx. With Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx predicted that the class antagonisms evident in nineteenth-century Europe would result in a revolution of

the proletariat, who would in turn replace the bourgeoisie to form a classless society in which “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 2004).

In his landmark study *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Robinson exposes how Marxism depended on a history rooted in Eurocentrism:

European Marxists have presumed more frequently than not that their project is identical with world-historical development. Confounded it would seem by the cultural zeal that accompanies ascendant civilizations, they have mistaken for universal verities the structures and social dynamics retrieved from their own distant and more immediate pasts (Robinson 2000, 2).

Charles Mills deepens this critique through an analysis of the relation between modernity, revolution, and white supremacy:

Marx’s demarcation and periodization of the “political” and “human” revolutions ignores the denial of equal “humanity” to the racially oppressed, and the corresponding need for a revolution not merely against the rule of the church and the rule of capital, but the rule of whites, the system of global white supremacy and its rationalizing time maps and framings of the modern (Mills 2020, 314).

He also points out Marx’s silence on Haiti and the Haitian Revolution in *The Communist Manifesto* (Mills 2020, 313–314).

Black scholars and critics of Arendt, Hegel, and Marx notwithstanding, “revolution”—like “modernity”—is so vexed with Eurocentric bias that the question becomes whether it has lost all validity as a critical term in contemporary art. Furthermore, after a century’s worth of revolutionary movements that have been thwarted, undermined, institutionalized, terminated, sabotaged, over-idealized, or rendered anti-democratic, the term may generate more disillusionment, skepticism, or outright hostility than dreams of a future utopia. “Revolution” today carries significant baggage, maintaining its polarizing effect between the left and the right but now driving a wedge among individuals across the political left, frustrating coalition-building and impeding solidarity efforts.⁶ Although the perceived failure of twentieth-century revolutions to deliver on their promises propels a loss of confidence in their potential, decolonial interventions in the present insist on the possibility of social transformation and new beginnings. With an eye toward a more critically situated use of the term, this chapter will address the paradox and promise of revolution. I will further probe the relation among race, modernity, and revolution through the work of Arendt and Hegel, discussing how Hegelian thought continues to permeate art history as a discipline and especially the discourse of modern and contemporary art. Turning then to the Western hemisphere, I hone in on twentieth-century revolutions and examine the relationship between revolution and representation in aesthetic as well as political terms. The chapter concludes with a proposition to embrace the aspect of temporal recurrence from the word’s original meaning, thereby thinking of “revolution” not as a line but as a circle.

Revolution as Transformation in Western Thought

In the English language, revolution originally “indicated a revolving movement in space or time” (Williams 2014, 209). Arendt notes that the Latin usage, popularized by Copernicus, meant “the regular, lawfully revolving motion of the stars,” a far cry from a term that later comes to signify “a process which spells the definite end of an old order and brings about the birth of a new world” (Arendt 1990, 42). She and others point out that the political

meaning of “revolution” emerged with the restoration of the British monarchs in seventeenth-century England, where “it was used for a movement of revolving back to some pre-established point and, by implication, of swinging back into a preordained order” (Arendt 1990, 42–43). The word’s political meaning shifted definitively with the French Revolution and, with it, the Western concept of time. History went from being perceived as “a cycle of eternal recurrences” to “a movement that was essentially rectilinear and hence did not revolve back to what was known before but stretched out into an unknown future” (Arendt 1990, 55). Prior, as Arendt describes, men “were all born throughout the centuries to a natural or historical spectacle that was essentially always the same” (Arendt 1990, 28).

The approach to history as linear teleology is indebted to Hegel, who was, in the eyes of Arendt, a revolutionary thinker born of revolution. In her words, “the most far-reaching consequence of the French Revolution was the birth of the modern concept of history in Hegel’s philosophy” (Arendt 1990, 51). Hegel regarded “Europe ... [as] absolutely the end of history” (Hegel 1900, 103) defining history in restrictive terms as “limited to that which makes an essential epoch into the development of Spirit” (Hegel 1900, 142). He later elaborates:

History requires Understanding—the power of looking at an object in an independent objective light and comprehending it in its rational connection with other objects. Those people therefore are alone capable of History, and of prose generally, who have arrived at that period of development (and can make that their starting point) at which individuals comprehend their own existence as independent, *i.e.* possess self-consciousness (Hegel 1900, 162).

Describing India and other world cultures as devoid of history, Hegel refers to Black Africans (“Negros”) in especially derogatory terms, alleging that slavery is “another characteristic fact” for them because, although European and American enslavement of Africans was a “bad” thing, “their lot in their own land is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists; for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing—an object of no value” (Hegel 1900, 96). The dehumanization of Black people is here firmly established by one of the world’s most influential thinkers. Hegel acknowledges that slavery is unjust, for “the essence of humanity is *Freedom*,” immediately qualifying this statement, “but for this man must be matured” (Hegel 1900, 99). Given that he considers Africa not to be a “historical part of the World,” it is no surprise that historians steeped in Eurocentrism dismissed the Haitian Revolution outright.

Traditional art history has been dependent on a Hegelian approach to its objects of study. Indeed, Hegel’s characterization of historical understanding quoted earlier—“looking at an object in an independent objective light and comprehending it in its rational connection with other objects”—fits art history to a tee. As Keith Moxey argues, art historiography is Hegelian:

because the fundamental strategies of its approach to history—the idea of purposive or teleological development, the belief that the sequence of styles characterizing the different periods embodies an inherent principle of historical change, and the conviction that certain artists transcend their historical circumstances in order to enable great artistic transformations (*i.e.*, revolutions)—all figure prominently in its historical narratives (Moxey 2000, 10).

The trope of “great artistic transformations” continues to be a guiding logic for modernism, but now accelerated and topped with an aggressive element. In the words of Paul K. Saint-Amour, “[m]odernism doesn’t blush; it blasts. Its reputation is for strength in extremis.... In the words of its early theorists, modernism is ‘rebellion against authority,’ a ‘revolution of the word,’ ‘kicking over old walls’ and ‘breaking of “Do Nots”’” (Saint-Amour 2018, 437).

The incompatibility between this model of aggression as progression and a plural multivocal approach demonstrates why it has been so difficult to “globalize” modernism. Indeed, as Jane Chin Davidson has argued, “[t]he tacit rhetoric of ‘avant-gardism,’ embedded in the ideals of ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’ art, as well as the separation of the primitive from the progressive, reinscribes the colonialist ideology in *art history* more than in any other discipline of the academy” (Davidson 2023; emphasis in original).

In addition to the dismissal of the Haitian Revolution as a worthy case study, Arendt also pooh-poohs more recent revolutionary movements, including classic examples such as the Bolshevik (October) Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949, and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 (her treatise was published in 1963), writing, “[t]he revolutionists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in sharp contrast to their predecessors ... were desperate men, and the cause of revolution, therefore, attracted more and more the desperadoes, namely, ‘an unhappy species of the population’” (Arendt 1990, 222). By discounting social movements from outside the West (in the most limited sense), she ensures that the meaning of “revolution” remains ensconced in Eurocentric models. The effects of her silencing of other revolutions as objects of analysis resonate with the words of Māori cultural theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith: “Knowledge and the power to define what counts as real knowledge lie at the epistemic core of colonialism” (Smith 2021, xii). Such erasures determine that the objects of study and the frames that contain them remain rooted in Western ontologies, while relegating movements that could themselves generate new epistemologies to the margins. Fischer points out how disciplinary boundaries prevent potential paradigm shifts: “If colonialism and slavery can be reduced to a host of ‘specializations’ or ‘subdisciplines,’ then core areas can continue to treat them as mere disturbances on the margins of history: an anomaly, a more or less bothersome irregularity in the march of progress” (Fischer 2006, 363). Moreover, she notes, “[t]he most highly prized areas of study—like the history of the French Revolution in France, or the study of Hegel in German philosophy—are the least likely suddenly to give up on the claims to centrality and self-containment of the subject” (Fischer 2006, 363). The same could be said for modernist art history. While scholars of modernism typically embrace the cultural expression of the Bolshevik Revolution as a bona fide avant-garde, they do so within a narrowly circumscribed framework; other examples of revolutionary art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries lie squarely outside the mainstream. Analyzing them almost always entails passing through Western models to justify how these may relate to or depart from the norm. In the study of global modernisms, the concession has been to expand the timeline but, more often than not, the central tenets remain undisturbed.⁷

The Radical/Revolution(ary) Connection

The discussion so far firmly establishes that “revolution” and “revolutionary” in the discourse of modernism, the avant-garde, and now “global” contemporaneity have been unacknowledged temporal categories presupposing an aesthetic norm that assumes a linear timeline, signals newness and innovation according to an accepted standard, and cloaks its reliance on “the false universalism of the Western temporal imaginary” (Hunfeldt 2022, 101; on contemporaneity see Smith 2013). In art discourse, “revolutionary” is often used to signify “radical,” perhaps even interchangeably. In critical race scholarship, this term is associated with Black thought, specifically the Black radical tradition. In the words of Cedric Robinson, who coined the phrase, the Black intellectuals who formed this movement included W. E. B. DuBois, C. L. R. James, Richard Wright, and others:

[whose] predecessors were Africans by origins, predominantly recruited from the same cultural matrices, subjected to similar and interrelated systems of servitude and

oppression, and mobilized by identical impulses to recover their dignity. And over the centuries, the liberation projects of these men and women in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas acquired similar emergent collective forms in rebellion and marronage, similar ethical and moral articulations of resistance (Robinson 2000, xxxi).

In other words, Robinson is positing an alternative genealogy independent of the Western canon. In an excavation of the term “radical,” Krista Cowman notes that its etymology “from the latin [sic] *radix* or root—suggests the need to uproot completely rather than to alter existing structures” (Cowman 2010). Stating that “radicals were consistently counterhegemonic,” she also points out that the term is no longer exclusively the domain of the political left and now has come to be associated with the right (Cowman 2010, 1, 2). Regardless of party affiliation, “radical,” like “revolutionary,” has positive connotations in the discourse of contemporary art, keeping alive the counterhegemonic promise of modernist art history. As such, both are relational terms that signal a departure from a given status quo. Often, however, said rebellion is aesthetic and, rather than playing an emancipatory role, results in the reproduction of existing power structures. Indeed, “revolutionary” and “radical,” like abstraction and representation, may be mobilized toward a spectrum of ends. As descriptive terms in art history and criticism, they do not necessarily designate projects of collective liberation.

Consider the blockbuster *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1950 to 1985* at the Hammer Museum of Art in Los Angeles, one of the headliners of the Getty Foundation’s Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA 2017 series of exhibitions (Giunta and Fajardo-Hill 2017). Featuring the work of 120 Latin American and Latina women, despite much acclaim, it was criticized for its lack of representation of Black and Indigenous artists as well as for its exclusion of countries with significant diaspora populations in the United States, such as El Salvador and the Dominican Republic—Haiti is erased in this mapping of “Latin” America, which recognizes only artists with roots in the Spanish-speaking countries and Brazil (Reyes 2019a, 133; Rodriguez 2021, 82–83). By centering the work of white women, the exhibition opened itself to the kinds of critiques that have been leveled against mainstream feminism, as voiced by Rafia Zakaria: “the white gaze has never been disaggregated from feminism itself: it has become the only feminism we recognize or even have language for. And that means most of the time when women speak ‘feminism,’ they unintentionally take on the cadence and color of whiteness” (Zakaria 2021, 11). Writing about the exhibition in *Artforum*, Daniel Quiles noted that “the radicalism of the show’s eponymous women was—and continues to be—contingent on the broader normative structures they subvert” (Quiles 2018). For the most part, this normative structure was patriarchy. The exhibition curators did not foreground the positionality of the women, most of whom were members of dominant classes, nor challenge mainstream standards for evaluating art beyond an approach of inclusion in the canon.⁸

One such “radical” artist was Beatriz González, whose works were “provocations” that, according to Ana María Reyes, “challenged and aggravated many different cultural agents” in her native Colombia (Reyes 2019b, 10). González’s paintings are characteristically based on prototypes from the history of art or popular visual culture, from Édouard Manet’s *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* (1863) to newspaper clippings. Rather than living up to expectation in creating original images, she defiantly reveled in the space of reproduction, opening herself up to charges of plagiarism while also leading her aesthetic to be linked to Pop art (Reyes 2019b, 176–179). In *The Siga Suicides* (1965), the artist appropriated a photograph from a tabloid story about a couple who leapt to their deaths by drowning in the Siga Reservoir, reproducing it in three painted versions (for a thorough discussion of the paintings, see Reyes 2019b, 73–111). The story captured mass interest because the couple had had their portrait taken before committing suicide (or murder-suicide) to atone for the woman’s lost purity. Depicting a smiling couple jointly holding a bouquet of white flowers, the photograph and the paintings it inspired were described as *cursi*, or tacky, by Marta Traba, Colombia’s leading

art critic (Reyes 2019b, 74, 94–102). Based on this and subsequent paintings embracing the reproduction of popular imagery through flattened forms and bright colors, Traba regarded González, in Reyes's words, as "the standard-bearer for the counterculture challenge to hegemonic notions of taste" (Reyes 2019b, 94). Rather than celebrating González for her radicality, however, Reyes argues that the artist's "appropriation of urban popular culture revealed the class condescension of the local elites, even of progressive intellectuals," asserting, "[t]he fact that an amorous couple that committed suicide (or a homicide and suicide) could be considered comic and not tragic betrays the kind of class condescension central to understanding how González's works functioned in the imaginary of Colombian spectators in the 1960s" (Reyes 2019b, 24, 25). Reyes posits that local elites "celebrated the high art that referenced the *cursilería* [tackiness] of urban popular culture as resistance to cultural neocolonialism while never fully owning up to its own prejudicial coloniality" (Reyes 2019b, 24). Seen in this light, González's tactics of appropriation and reproduction, rather than signaling a "radical" project of uprooting the status quo for the benefit of common struggle and collective liberation, becomes a metaphor for the reproducibility of the bourgeois subject itself, or to use Louis Althusser's phrasing: her paintings function in service of "the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation" (Althusser 1971). The radical nature of her work is therefore merely aesthetic.

No doubt the terms "revolutionary" and "radical" will continue to be used metaphorically in much the same way as "decolonization" and its cognates (Tuck and Yang 2012). Even if we were to define "revolutionary art" more narrowly, as the artistic expression of a given political movement whose aim is to overthrow the status quo or that is affiliated with a revolutionary process, it is admittedly difficult ever to fix a meaning because of varying political outlooks: one may not accept the revolution in the first place, or one might reject what a revolution has become. María de Lourdes Mariño Fernández likens the divisions wrought by the Cuban Revolution to Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the *la rajadura* (split, abyss):

Within the history of the island, the Cuban revolution became that split, and the borders of this abyss are policed by opposing ideological narratives in perpetual battle. Inhabiting the abyss, or surviving in the split, has become the creative and political strategy of a group of artists and intellectuals raised by the dying myth of a Third World socialist revolution (Mariño Fernández 2023; emphasis in the original).

In contemporary Venezuela, artists Érika Ordosgoitti and Deborah Castillo developed an oppositional feminist practice against the social movement known as the Bolivarian Revolution, which took hold during the presidency of Hugo Chávez (1998–2013) and has been furthered by his successors (see Flores 2023, Castro and Tronconis 2019). In this case, their art is counterhegemonic as opposed to counterrevolutionary in that they seek an alternative path forward rather than a return to a neoliberal status quo of unfettered free-market capitalism.⁹

Latin American Revolutions and Anti-Blackness

While the discourse on revolution has been a leitmotif for the Latin American left throughout the twentieth century, from the Mexican Revolution (1910) to the election of Chávez (1998), and into the present, the absence of Haiti as a model is glaring. I maintain that Latin America as a construct was forged in contradistinction to Haiti, and the region's anti-Blackness is parts of its foundational identity (Flores 2021). Independence movements from Spain erupted in Mexico and South America in the early nineteenth century. Following the example of Haiti, these insurgencies, notably, are never referred to as revolutions, unlike their US counterpart. The takeaway from this nomenclature is that *criollos* of Spanish ancestry maintained the right and privilege to demand self-determination (their freedom was

never in question) over territories that were rightfully theirs, while sustaining that the Haitian Revolution was illegitimate, its perpetrators criminals. Former colonies turned republics lived in fear of uprisings by enslaved and oppressed peoples, the phantom of Haiti always looming large as a regional existential threat.

Black erasure continues to reverberate in revolutionary discourse from Latin America, even among well-intentioned intellectuals.¹⁰ Specifically, Marxist-inspired frameworks privilege class above any other factors, and the commonplace tying of regional identity to racial mixture (*mestizaje*) disingenuously presupposes that mixed-race people cannot be racist. *Mestizaje* as a defining Latin American trait was promoted in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, especially through the writings of José Vasconcelos, a philosopher and politician. Building on a long intellectual tradition, Vasconcelos drafted the best-known treatise in defense of *mestizaje*, *The Cosmic Race* (1925), arguing that Latin America's racial mixture, rather than being a negative factor as was the traditional derogatory outlook, would produce a superior breed of people (Vasconcelos 1997). Today, this perspective is recognized as eugenicist in that *mestizaje* was really a process toward collective whitening, and Vasconcelos is not considered a radical thinker. Indeed, *mestizaje* in state policy looks to assimilate the populace to mold them into docile citizens as a counterinsurgency measure. Forging a national body in Mexico was a post-revolutionary imperative because Indigenous diversity, regional autonomy, and a lack of allegiance to the nation state had all contributed to the outbreak of the revolution.¹¹ Seeking to ensure political stability moving forward, nation building took many forms, including pedagogical and public art initiatives that were touted as a revolutionary legacy. As in Cuba, as argued by Alejandro de la Fuente, "[n]ational unity was to be achieved at the expense of racial identities" (de la Fuente 1998, 44).

Here, we confront the relational aspect of revolution in its political meaning—as soon as a revolutionary process is successful, counterinsurgency tactics fall into place to protect it. The term “counterrevolutionary” may become weaponized to the degree that those who dissent from revolutionary doctrine risk becoming enemies of the state. This has very much been the case in Cuba, from the moment the revolution triumphed to the present day. Race-based movements in support of Black Cubans are seen in this light. Since Fidel Castro declared the end of racism in 1962 as a revolutionary achievement, discussions of race became verboten. Arendt argues that in revolutions that activate terror to maintain order, “the interests of the whole must automatically, and indeed permanently, be hostile to the particular interests of the citizen” (Arendt 1990, 79). The question of citizenship here becomes key. Commenting on other writings by Arendt, Jennifer Gaffney states that, to her, “being a citizen means affirming a coherent historical narrative in order to forget the violence and exclusion of the past,” but that the example of the Haitian Revolution does not allow for this: “Instead, it is marked by fractures and interruptions that can neither be forgotten nor held together consistently in a single historical consciousness” (Gaffney 2018, 702). Trouillot interjects: “Even when the historical continuities are unquestionable, in no way can we assume a simple correlation between the magnitude of events as they happened and their relevance for the generations that inherit them through history” (Trouillot 2015, 16). Given the histories of indescribable violence across the entire Western hemisphere, there can be no such thing as a “single historical consciousness.” National belonging is a fraught matter, and any revolution that asks citizens to forget the past is acting in the interests of whiteness.

Revolutionary Art

A charged concept, revolution is also a hopeful one. In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, artists came together to co-create a new society grounded in social justice, solidarity, and collective action (on this era, see Flores 2013). The moment was short-lived, as possibility gave way to dogma, but during the fervent decade of the 1920s, revolutionary art



FIGURE 14.1 Fernando Leal, *The Dancers of Chalma*, 1922–1923. Encaustic (approximately 437 square feet (40.6 m²)). Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso (formerly Escuela Nacional Preparatoria), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City. Fernando Leal Audirac.

engaged in a significant process of self-reflection that reframed representation away from characteristic one-sidedness of artist-representative and represented-subject toward dialogical approach based on listening and nurturing mutual trust and respect. A watershed work is Fernando Leal's encaustic mural *The Dancers of Chalma* (1922–1923; Figure 14.1), which depicts Indigenous costumed dancers along with worshippers paying homage to the black, Christ of the church of Chalma. The work both inaugurated the visual vocabulary of the mural movement (the artist was among the first generation of muralists) and decried mestizaje as the foundational basis of Mexican nationalism by celebrating Indigenous autonomy. The artist underscores the agency of the native Mexicans, who proudly maintain their belief systems four centuries after the Conquest of Mexico and the forced imposition of Catholicism. The sacred color black in Pre-Columbian practices of worship combined with the devotion of the figures signal their religious syncretism.¹² Including himself in a self-portrait as one of the dancers, Leal embraces his own Indigenous ancestry rather than assimilating to Western norms, thereby reversing the dynamic of state mestizaje. The mural's facture, with this figure functioning as a kind of fulcrum, along with the exaggerated manner of depicting his features reveal his position to be a conflicted one, not a simple matter of Indigenous appropriation but an awareness of the stakes of claiming an identification with either side. The mural revels in the potential of revolution as an emancipatory process while distancing itself from the cooptation of its legacy by the Mexican state. In a later mural cycle, *The Epic of Simón Bolívar* (1930–1935), Fernando Leal pays homage to the Haitian Revolution as a precursor to the independence movements in South America propelled by the nineteenth-century Venezuelan statesman Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), known as The Liberator.

Simultaneously referencing multiple coexisting traditions all the while grounding the mural in the contemporary moment, Leal refuses the anthropological trap of depicting Natives as inhabiting a different temporality from Westerners and rejects a reading of history as linear progression (Fabian 1983). *The Dancers of Chalma* and subsequent murals activate figuration in the service of bringing forth an avant-garde project that is both political and aesthetic. Many other examples of revolutionary art also rely on the human figure to signal an alliance with a political cause, and they are often discounted as ideological as opposed to modernist, as though both terms are necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed,



FIGURE 14.2 Didier William, *Nou poko rive, men y ap tann nou*, 2018. Collage, acrylic, wood carving on panel (64 × 90 inches (162.6 × 228.6 centimeters)). Courtesy of Didier William.

Mexican muralism occupies an uneasy space within the history of modernism, where it is viewed as an add-on or token rather as a protagonist.

Revolution disassociated from Western models propel us to rethink representation in its political and aesthetic meanings, to question received frameworks for assigning value, and especially to refuse straightforward and unitary historical narratives. Always latent as a possibility in times of profound political unrest and popular dissatisfaction, revolution may inspire, terrify, or both. Haitian-American artist Didier William invokes the potential of revolution in the painting *Nou poko rive, men y ap tann nou* (2018; Figure 14.2), a phrase in Haitian Creole that translates as “We have not arrived, but they are waiting for us.” The painting features an empty stage framed by striped multicolored curtains. Shadows describing body parts and indeterminate corporeal forms sit atop them, while in the open space atop the stage and below are countless incised eyes, creating an abstract mass in black and white that recalls the visual games of op art. The eyes are a signature feature of William’s work. As interpreted by Zoé Samudzi, “[t]hese eyes are not simply returning a hostile and subjugating gaze. They are like apotropaic amulets warding off the evil eye: an army of ever-watchful, unblinking, cyclopean eyes. They are the materialization of an autonomous and collectivized claiming of the right to look” (Samudzi 2021, 8). In his refusal to offer a straightforward narrative, William embraces Édouard Glissant’s notion of opacity. In the words of the Martinican thinker:

Transparency no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the world in its own image. There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and unexplored even today, denied or insulted more often than not, and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing (Glissant 1997, 111).

Despite the space being empty of distinguishable figures, the eyes provide the “insistent presence” described by Glissant. The enigmatic title of the piece could be comforting—“they” could refer to the ancestors—or menacing. The stage of the painting becomes a metaphor for both something about to unfold and something for the viewer to complete. In the words of the artist, the space “leaves some room for us to do the work that history hasn’t done with the vast expanse of unknown information that is still left to be dealt with in regards to the Caribbean” (William 2021, 112).

The world we inhabit was built on suffering and injustice, and these legacies of violence show no signs of abating with or without the threat of revolution. For all the philosophical

musings on freedom over centuries of Western thought, the ignored Haitian Revolution offers the most powerful lesson of all. Jennifer Gaffney writes:

[Its example] opens new paths to understanding our responsibility to the world we have inherited. Specifically, it provides a platform to begin conceiving of the space of politics anew, not as a sanctuary from the ghosts of the past, as Arendt suggests, but rather as a kind of haunted house in which these ghosts are able to dwell and help guide political practice (Gaffney 2018, 702).

Suggesting the collapse of past and present and eschewing the Western construct of linear time, these remarks recall the words of Black feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman:

To believe, as I do, that the enslaved are our contemporaries is to understand that we share their aspirations and defeats, which isn't to say that we are owed what they were due but rather to acknowledge that they accompany our every effort to fight against domination, to abolish the color line, and to imagine a free territory, a new commons. It is to take to heart their knowledge of freedom. The enslaved knew that freedom had to be taken; it was not the kind of thing that could ever be given to you. The kind of freedom that could be given to you could just as easily be taken back. ... It is won and lost, again and again. It is a glimpse of possibility, an opening, a solicitation without any guarantee of duration before it flickers and then is extinguished.

The demands of the slave on the present have everything to do with making good the promise of abolition, and this entails much more than the end of property in slaves. It requires the reconstruction of society, which is the only way to honor our debt to the dead. This is the intimacy of our age with theirs—an unfinished struggle (Hartman 2006, 169–170).

Authors invoking “revolution” in contemporary art discourse should heed these words, no longer thinking of the term as a line implying that something has been superseded but in a circular sense of a continuing, recurring struggle whose ultimate, elusive goal is nothing less than abolition in the broadest possible sense.

Notes

- 1 For contemporary statistics on poverty in the United States, see <https://confrontingpoverty.org/poverty-facts-and-myths/americas-poor-are-worse-off-than-elsewhere>, accessed on June 26, 2022.
- 2 “Arendt’s praise of the American Revolution is especially alarming given the flagrant contradiction between freedom and slavery; the principle of the equality of all men has been belied by the simultaneous and intentional enslavement of a significant portion of the population” (Gines 2014, 66).
- 3 A recent front page *The New York Times* article foregrounding the history of Haiti and the reparations it was forced to pay to France in return for the liberty of its citizens was widely criticized for seemingly appear to break a story that has long been known to Haitians and anyone who has cared to learn about Haiti’s history. See Porter, Méheut, Apuzzo, and Gebrekidan (2022).
- 4 The phrase “new beginning” comes from Arendt and is used repeatedly in *On Revolution*. The concept of “non-event” is foregrounded in Trouillot (2015, 70–107).
- 5 Buck-Morss (2000) famously asserts, “Hegel knew ...” (844, 852).
- 6 A particularly powerful skeptical assessment of revolution from the perspective of China is Xiaobo (1994). I am grateful to Peggy Wang for this reference.

- 7 For example, Geeta Kapur advocates for “reperiodiz[ing] the modern” to account for uneven processes of modernization outside the West in her famous essay “When Was Modernism in Indian Art?”, in Kapur (2000, 298). More recent interventions complicate the received binary of center and periphery by sussing out the complexity of interactions among different peoples throughout history. See Stanford-Friedman (2006); Doyle (2010).
- 8 Andrea Giunta states, “how am I defining a feminist methodology in general terms? It’s whatever is alternative to the patriarchal methodology,” in Allen-Mossman (2018).
- 9 On Ordosgoitti and Castillo, see the exhibition *Gendering Protest: Deborah Castillo and Érika, Ordosgoitti*, curated by Tatiana Flores, Dana Women Artists Series Galleries at Mabel Smith Douglass Library, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ, 2020, <https://cwah.rutgers.edu/gendering-protest-deborah-castillo-and-erika-ordosgoitti/>, accessed on June 28, 2023. See, as well, Flores (2023); Castro and Tronconis (2019).
- 10 A case in point is Enrique Dussel’s “Giro descolonizador desde el pueblo hasta la segunda descolonización,” which focuses on Latin American revolutions of the twentieth century with no mention of Haiti, in Dussel (2007, 482–550). Another example is Grandin and Joseph (2010), which contains only a handful of references to Haiti.
- 11 A foundational text outlining the need to create a unified Mexican nation is Gamio (1916/2010).
- 12 On Black Christ symbolism in devotional practices of Indigenous Mexicans, Molly Harbour Bassett and Jeanette Favrot Peterson write: “[a]s central as the crucifix was to Christian iconography, when reproduced with a blackened body in the New World it subscribed to a traditional and more positive visual code associated with supreme male deities, ancestry, healing, and extraordinary seeing” (Bassett and Peterson 2016, 55).

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ART AND ITS MARKETPLACES

It Was a Small World, After All

Suzanne Hudson

Living in the center alone does not constitute provincialism. Provincialism is the province's unshakable belief in itself as the center. However, the unshakable belief that one lives in the center remains provincial even if one actually lives in the center. Hardly any city in the world is more provincial than New York (Oliver Marchart 2020).

In 1964, Walt Disney opened an attraction in a Pepsi Cola-sponsored pavilion at the New York World's Fair, with proceeds benefiting the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). "It's a Small World," as "Children of the World" came to be called, proved so popular that it was reinstalled in California, at the decade-old Disneyland, in 1966. In the discomfiting proximity of freeways that long since sundered orange groves, one can still board a diminutive vessel that ferries its riders along a channel connecting the seven continents. Each is signaled by the site-specific costumes worn by animatronic dolls and the theatrical, unambiguous settings—the Eiffel Tower for France and the Taj Mahal for India—in which the wide-eyed cast dances, sings, and plays musical instruments. Through the ride's progression from place to place, folkloric outfits give way to a glittery wardrobe of white and silver, visually subsuming difference. As with the waterway that courses throughout, an ambient soundtrack likewise unifies the disparate regional cultures: one song recorded by people across the globe, but voiced only in English, performing a holism that could not withstand the cacophony of many languages.

As Katherine Baber and James Spickard later put the matter, "It's a Small World" demonstrates "a particularly American image of other countries," and "reinforces an ethnocentric sense that all the world's peoples are fundamentally just like Americans, albeit with different languages, foods, customs, and dress" (Baber and Spickard 2015, 225). That this chapter regarding contemporary art in New York takes as its entry point a Disney ride developed out of a world's fair might seem indirect. But "It's a Small World" proves a helpful analogy, betraying a logic of false universalism that will be argued for the subject at hand. Tracing a history of US-based debates around postmodernism and the commodification of art and their development into global contexts, the text suggests the pervasive nationalism of a New York-centered art world despite the appeal to, and false incorporation of, so many elsewhere. As with Disney's ride, it remains entirely within the framework of the neocolonial American imaginary.

Contemporary Art in the “Global” Context

The consequence of expansionism as well as its justification, “It’s a Small World” models cultural imperialism. Laudan Nooshin connects it to the colonial voyage of discovery, beginning with Europe and ending with the United States. She situates this framing tendency within a history of world’s fairs that displayed colonial subjects and other commodities (Nooshin 2004, 241; also see Rydell 1984). (This grim history similarly remains legible in the conversion of royal collections into encyclopedic museums, their bounty and pretense of common validity a testament to the Enlightenment project of classification that empire-building made possible (Shelton 1994).) Nooshin’s analysis belongs to a tradition of European thinkers who use Disneyland to address the United States. Vanessa Schwartz notes that Louis Marin, Umberto Eco, and Jean Baudrillard each penned such texts in the late 1970s and 1980s, maintaining that they “provided a series of ethnographic essays in a period when it was still rare to turn such a critical eye on the rituals of modern western culture” (Schwartz 2020, 57). However, as is key to consider here, this was also the period in which artists were turning exactly to the systems as well as products of modern Western culture as targets of critique. These critiques included, and often advanced from, the institutions of the art world: auction houses and commercial galleries, as well as museums and art schools.

Beginning in the 1960s—coeval with free speech and liberation politics, as well as anti-war protests against escalating US involvement in Vietnam—many embraced practices of minimal and conceptual art. Despite their differences, both challenged how art was made, disseminated, and seen. The former stripped art of expressive gesture and pared down aesthetics to highlight the work’s material properties, while the latter extended this emphasis on process to the extent that the idea behind the work became as important as the rendering of a physical object. Hal Foster has argued that minimalism in particular posed a crux in that it “consummated one formalist model of modernism, completed and broke with it at once” (Foster 1996, 35). What he means is that minimalism attended so forthrightly to the formal characteristics and conventions of medium—what modernist critic Clement Greenberg upheld as the highest goal for art—that it moved past them as well. In this passage, minimal art eschewed the Greenbergian notion that art should be autonomous, somehow free from subject matter and reference, and instead emphasize the space around it, the perceptions of individuated and self-aware spectators, and the architecture that set up the experience of the art.

From here, artists began to question the literal walls of these spatial enclosures, as in Mel Bochner’s *Measurement Room* (1969), in which he measured and marked out the walls of the exhibition space. They also took walls to stand metonymically for institutions, referring to the policies they implicitly enacted, ideologies they naturalized, and privileges they worked to maintain. Far from neutral, these institutions’ exclusionary and sometimes censoring practices became the subject of art, not just the formative conditions behind it. This gave rise to what became known as institutional critique, a mode of artmaking that confronts the inequities of what and how art gets valued, collected and exhibited, written about and conserved. Moving far from a Kantian idea of disinterest, artists like Hans Haacke called attention to the framing of art by interested parties.¹ The Guggenheim Museum canceled a show of Haacke’s on account of a work mapping New York slums and who owned them (Glueck 1971). Following this, the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, rejected Haacke’s *Manet-Projekt ‘74* in 1974, which details the unseemly provenance of Edouard Manet’s *Bunch of Asparagus* (1880) from board chairman Hermann Josef Abs, a onetime financial advisor to Adolf Hitler. Daniel Buren, in turn, appropriated Haacke’s piece to preserve its visibility, but the museum likewise defaced Buren’s wallpaper with its image, pasting white paper over it (Carrion-Murayari and Gioni 2019; Daniel Buren and Liza Bear 1974).

Publicizing issues around funding for collections, exhibitions, and museum sponsorship—or who pays for the art, where their money comes from, and how this corporate philanthropy

might serve as an alibi for malfeasance—remained a hallmark for Haacke, and for this line of practice more broadly. This obtains even as museums began to reap the rewards of what Aruna D'Souza names a “performative form of self-critique” (D'Souza 2019). Out of dissatisfaction with prevailing opportunities, some artists took a different approach and founded alternative spaces. In New York alone, these included A.I.R. Gallery (Artists in Residence, Inc.), started in 1972 by Susan Williams, Barbara Zucker, Howardena Pindell, and others as an artist-directed and maintained gallery for women, and Just Above Midtown Gallery (JAM), founded in 1974 by Linda Goode Bryant, who showcased the work of artists of color. Other artist groups, including the Art Workers' Coalition, the Guerrilla Art Action Group, and the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, collectively protested classist, sexist, and racist practices in mainstream museums: from reducing admission fees (or offering free entry to augment accessibility) to encouraging more inclusive staff and leadership, collecting practices, and exhibition checklists, among much else (see Bryan-Wilson 2011; Morris and Hockley 2018). This is where the image of MoMA protests, currently on p. 191 (fig 15. 1) should be positioned. It relates directly to this text and has nothing to do with the text where it is currently dropped in.

That these last actions were taken in response to New York museums bears stressing, both as historical fact and historiographic consequence. Since WWII, and the shifts of international power that followed, New York assumed a more central, even hegemonic, role in stories of contemporary art, with once-dominant Europe declining in importance. (In such standard accounts of the post-war art world, the rest of the globe may as well not have

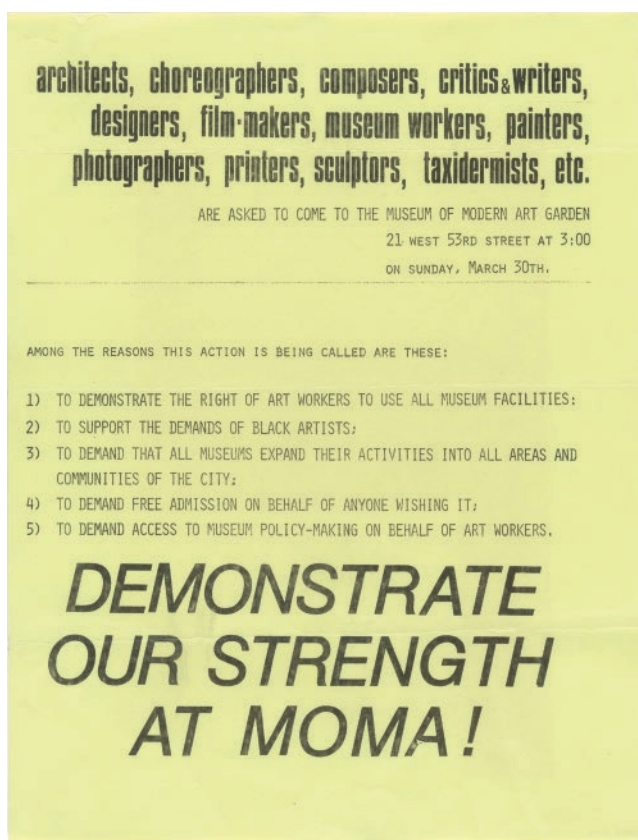


FIGURE 15.1 Art Worker's Coalition. Flier for protest at The Museum of Modern Art garden at 3:00, Sunday, March 30, 1969, 11 × 8 ½ inches (27.9 × 21.6 centimeters). Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Papers, I.A.536. Archives. Location: The Museum of Modern Art/New York, NY/USA. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA.

existed until the 2000s, if at all.²) In 1983, Serge Guilbaut published the important book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, thereafter glossed as a tale about Paris passing the baton of avant-garde aesthetics to New York. In it, he makes an argument for the political and social context within which abstract expressionism emerged, and found prominence during the Cold War as a liberal democratic project of anti-communist propaganda, with affiliated artists instrumentalized to this end (Guilbaut 1983).³ Reviewing the text at the time of its publication, Thomas Lawson synthesized Guilbaut's research in the service of another reading: that the events leading to New York's supremacy as a cultural epicenter—not least the decimation of European life and culture by the Nazis—had to do as well with the replacement of imports with US-made goods, including mass media, cinema, and art, also suitable for export (Lawson 1984, 83).

The larger point is that by the 1980s there was vigorous discussion around whether art exists within a general culture, if not its capitalist economy, or not. Clement Greenberg's aforementioned paradigm of autonomy relied on a patron class, to which artists were necessarily connected with an "umbilical cord of gold" (Greenberg 1939/1986). This notwithstanding, his theory of self-reflexive medium specificity, which had been operative since the 1940s, but was consolidated with the publication of his collected writings as *Art and Culture* in 1961, refused art's imbrication within a compromised social world. (James Meyer (2001) contends that this ultimately esoteric position first developed as a direct response to concerns over mounting fascism and a need to preserve high culture from the barbarism of war but also public lassitude in the face of ubiquitous popular entertainment (also see de Duve 1996).) His claims to this end extended to near-scientific objectivity in matters of aesthetic adjudication, or what he described as being "entirely empirical" (Greenberg 1960/1993), though it was patently clear that his judgments were subjective. By the time of his death in 1994, Greenberg had become the boogeyman of art history, whose oft-caricatured telos of modernism predicated upon the desired or actual separation of art from life had come to seem not only out of step with, but antagonistic to, ascendant politics of identity and imperatives of activism.

Nor did Greenberg's framing serve to account for the heterogeneous activities of the previous decades, which, in broad strokes, involved the questioning of modernism and its privileging of traditional media, stylistic coherence, the heroic subject (male by default), and the sui-generis artwork. Rosalind Krauss, a onetime disciple of Greenberg who came to reject his premises, mapped much of this in her volume *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Krauss 1986), which appeared in 1985. As Krauss exemplifies, what began in the 1960s as the philosophical and literary theory of structuralism, and then poststructuralism, was taken up by a range of thinkers within the visual arts, offering another template in which value was exposed to be historically contingent. Already in his influential *Simulacra and Simulation*, first released in French in 1981, Jean Baudrillard had claimed that the world had become thoroughly mediated, with images, signs, and symbols "simulating" reality (Baudrillard 1981/1994). And while not synonymous with postmodernism, Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction—the idea that conventions can be dismantled by rigorous analysis of the binary oppositions that produce meaning, and an attention to the contexts in which meaning (always relational) is produced—became crucial within the art world (Derrida 1967/1978, 1982).

Appropriation provided a key deconstructive strategy through which artists adapted images or objects from a pre-existing source as the basis for a new work. Such work was often photo-based, with extant materials taken wholesale or fragmented in collages that emphasize dislocation. (Beyond the art world, Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson made a case for postmodernism as not only refusing claims to directness of expression but also for performing intercession through techniques of pastiche (Jameson 1983).) This proved an art of proliferating reference and an act of critique against singularity, the priority of authorship, and the use of representation in perpetuating repressive cultural ideals. Although

anathema to Krauss, for Linda Nochlin, Lucy Lippard, Griselda Pollock, and others, these art historical shifts owed much to feminist interferences in a normalizing masculinist discourse. With sources clear, the point in these artistic strategies of appropriation becomes the act of recontextualization, not the creation of an artwork without precedent. This is a reflexive if no longer medium-specific commentary on the nature of art: its internal and self-replicating connection to media, representations, museums, and markets. As one of the most renowned appropriation artists, Sherrie Levine, posed:

The world is filled to suffocating. Man has placed his token on every stone. Every word, every image, is leased and mortgaged. We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash. ... We can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original (Levine 1982, 48).

Photography proved an important heuristic, as, in analogue photography, a negative produces infinite copies absent an original. The modest but watershed exhibition *Pictures*, curated by Douglas Crimp, which opened at Artists Space in New York in 1977, catalyzed this turn. The show constellated the work of five then relatively unknown artists, including Levine, who, though distinct in their approaches, were all turning to the use of recognizable images as a commentary on consumer culture and the shifting place of the visual (and art, specifically) within it. By 1982, when Levine drafted the earlier-cited text, she had opened her first solo show at Metro Pictures Gallery, New York, in 1981. Calling it *Sherrie Levine After Walker Evans*, Levine had rephotographed well-known US government sponsored, Farm Security Administration images of Depression-era tenant workers and their habitations from reproductions in a Walker Evans catalogue. The works come after their models in the dual respects of temporality and usurping rather than adulating homage. Begun a few years later, Levine's painted compositions recall modernist abstraction as a generic decorative scheme, as in her *Knot* paintings (1985–2002), in which she colors in the knots on plywood sheets as wry meditations on the painting as readymade. In this feminist gesture, Levine bridges a legacy of conceptualism and appropriation beyond photography.

This last point gives the lie to the assertions in art criticism of the irrevocable transfer of painting into commodity in these same years. Nonetheless, appropriation stood for a stance hostile to ideology; by contrast, painting came to occupy a recuperative, seemingly consensual position. Certain eminent artists, writers, and curators described the collapse of modernist painting and advent of postmodern art using the language of the end, and then endgame. (Endgame represents a term borrowed from chess, referring to the culminating stages of a game of potentially endless reexamination of ideas that had come before (Crimp 1981; Ross 1986).). This was not a referendum on the practicability of the whole of painting, just its production under modernist circumstances. Still, “the death of painting” became glib shorthand for debates about the meaning of art in general and painting in particular in a free-market culture (Buchloh 1981). This had much to do with the emergence of a group of painters—Julian Schnabel, Eric Fischl, Francesco Clemente, et al.—who were active internationally but based in New York. If by the 1970s art ranged across locations and bodies, extended into realized and nascent technologies, grounded in landscapes and dissolved into atmospheres, sedimented as language or refused to appear at all, this return to studio work, and specifically to painting by white men, was perceived by critics as a salve to conservatives in the art world and an economic engine powering the growth of the increasingly international art market (Suzanne 2021).

Those in favor of this work, as subsumed within a history of painting, charted a transhistorical humanism and regarded the avoidance of painting as an insignificant duration within a longer course.⁴ The problem was that this so-called neo-expressionistic work assumed a distinctly prelapsarian attitude, showing little concern for the potent interventions of feminist, queer, and other performance artists in the 1970s, to say nothing of multimedia

and installation art, or the contributions of Black arts and Chicano/a activist art. This was striking in the 1980s given concurrent anti-sexist actions by, say, Barbara Kruger and the Guerrilla Girls. Kruger was making text-and-image-based work that exposes the objectifying male gaze. The Guerrilla Girls were participating in direct protest and public speaking, always remaining anonymous through the use of aliases borrowed from women artists—e.g., Frida Kahlo and Käthe Kollwitz—and by wearing gorilla masks; they also produced posters and billboards and art installations that, in their oft-circulated words, fight discrimination with facts and humor.⁵ The neo-expressionists instead indulged in large-scale paintings given over to adolescent sexual fantasies, meaning to signify the communication of deep emotions as their patrimony (see Hudson 2015, for an expansion of this point). That the work bore traces of the hand, of life and labor—what Isabelle Graw calls *vitalist projections* (Graw 2013, 2018)⁶—and was to a piece, unique, also ensured a reception oriented around uniqueness. Yet this seemingly irreplaceable property became fungible in an expanding and ostensibly global contemporary art market, which remained decidedly Western. It grew, and aggressively, assimilating without being changed by the work of artists from other belief systems (Joselit 2020).⁷

Marketing and the Strategies of Contemporary Art

In 1973, Robert and Ethel Scull sold fifty works at the New York auction house Sotheby Parke Bernet, an occasion that accelerated the commodification of art.⁸ Collectors of abstract expressionist and pop art, the Sculls befriended artists and often purchased works directly from their studios—then flipped the art for a much higher price, only a few years hence, opening the door for art as marketplace speculation in what became a lasting tendency. For Doug Woodham, the event heralded nothing less than “the beginning of a new era in the art world: a hyper-commercialized art market focused on promoting and selling contemporary art” (Woodham 2017).⁹ This was the case not only for how it drew attention to contemporary art as a would-be asset class but also for how the staging of the sale leveraged publicity: publishing a sumptuous catalogue, touring the lots around the world in advance, using the art as a hub for social engagement, and broadcasting all of the aforementioned as news.¹⁰ This spectacle engaged living artists along with their works, not always for the good of the artist; in an especially terse exchange between Robert Scull and artist Robert Rauschenberg, Rauschenberg was furious that he was cut out of the deal, with only the collector profiting (see Baker 2018). Ensuing discussions around resale practices included art critic Robert Hughes calling for a federally legislated program to assist artists in *Time Magazine* the next year (Hughes 1974). (This still has not happened.)

The US dollar became the base currency for the art world, “when buyers from North America proved the drivers of a gradually globalizing trade,” as Melanie Gerlis (2010) notes. This obtains even as transactions in the primary market (the first point of sale) remained priced in the local currency. Sellers appealed to elite buyers beyond these regions, however, many of whom were now self-made, like the Sculls, rather than nobility collecting with inherited wealth.¹¹ The bull market of the 1980s and the widespread consumerism it unleashed across the West and Asia fueled the purchase of art, and for a larger base of consumers, and media touted record sales (Graw 2010).¹² (Apart from public sales data recorded from auctions, this remained a willfully opaque and unregulated field of activity until the 1990s, when the online resource artnet facilitated more market research and made data available to the general public.) But this triumphalism was neither uninterrupted nor absolute. International markets roiled with Black Monday in 1987 and the Nikkei crash in 1991; in a kind of second act, the Great Recession began in late 2007, following the collapse of the US housing market and global financial crisis. This led to another accounting, if corrected for by the Internet and online sales, as well as art fairs, as discussed later. Black

Monday signaled the end of Ronald Reagan's boomtimes, its destabilizing effects persisting well into the next decade, during which time the politics of scarcity overlapped with those of identity.

A series of social and aesthetic controversies put representation and the expression of values at the heart of partisan morality politics. These included legal battles over an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of erotic images and the defunding of the National Endowment for the Arts over new congressional "decency standards," both in 1990. In 1991, James Davison Hunter published the watershed *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, a text describing a widening rift between traditionalists and progressives. In 1992, conservative politician Patrick Buchanan, then seeking his party's presidential nomination, picked up Hunter's sociological read for other purposes, decrying: "It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself" (Buchanan 1992). Domestic-policy focused activity happened alongside geopolitical events, from the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, to student-led protests in China, the First Gulf War, the passing of the NAFTA treaty, and the advent of the neoliberal order (characterized by deregulated, free-market capitalism). But the locality of the culture wars must be underscored (see Schwartz 2014). The struggle to define American culture was driven not by some perceived threat of a value system imposed from without, but irreconcilable discord from within: by extreme suspicion and paranoia on the part of the political right about the decline of Christian religious mores, as focalized by the increasing visibility of homosexuality and availability of abortion, and the perceived threat of multiculturalism to white America.

Many artists demonstrated their positions by taking up abject bodily practices, sometimes autobiographical, responding to these pressures as well as to the unprecedented trauma of the AIDS pandemic. Activist groups including ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), fierce pussy, and Gran Fury (an artists' collective that consolidated out of ACT UP meetings), formed to raise public consciousness around the twinned epidemiological and political crises. This tilt to direct engagement is epitomized by the 1993 Whitney Biennial exhibition, curated by Thelma Golden, John G. Hanhardt, Lisa Phillips, and Elisabeth Sussman. Their presentation of recent art embraced George Holliday's 1991 ten-minute videotape of the Rodney King beating at the hands of the Los Angeles police (their acquittal led to the 1992 Los Angeles uprising); another notable contribution was Daniel J. Martinez's redesign of the museum's admission buttons to read: "I CAN'T IMAGINE EVER WANTING TO BE WHITE." Press response was savage, confirming antipathy to the specificity and nature of these lived experiences—what Jerry Saltz named "the art of the first person" (Saltz and Corbett 2016)—that the show centered. In an equivocal review that claimed diversity at the expense of quality, Roberta Smith deemed it a "watershed" despite its substitution of "didactic moralizing for genuine visual communication" (Smith 1993).

The Biennial highlighted an embrace of postcolonial theory in the art world. Its unflinching accounting of American racism, too, was a hallmark of other contemporaneous practices and shows. Instances include Golden's signal 1994 exhibition *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, also at the Whitney, which concerned representations of African-American men in the post-civil rights era, and Kara Walker's breakout installation of cut-paper silhouettes of antebellum atrocities in the exhibition *Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War As It Occurred B'tween the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*, at the Drawing Center, New York, also in 1994. Looking back on this period, Bridget R. Cooks observes:

many marginalized artists were briefly included in the mainstream art world only to have their art dismissed as examples of "identity politics." The term was used to degrade work that critics did not want to spend time understanding because it dealt with histories that they believed did not belong (see Saltz and Corbett 2016; Cooks 2011).

By the 2000s, though, the market had accommodated cultural pluralism. (Stuart Hall (1997, 239) broached similar issues in discussing “commodity racism,” referring to the clothing brand United Colors of Benetton’s use of diverse models as a marketing strategy of co-opting difference.) The identity-decade’s culmination might be registered by Golden’s generation-defining show, *Freestyle*, at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2001, for which she coined the term “post-Black.” There was, in this emergent discourse, an argument that Black artists could work without identity being the primary, or focal, referent and guarantee of that work’s meaning.

The notion that aesthetics were compromised by activism was in turn answered by a return to beauty and conciliatory works of appeasement, also in the 1990s (see Hickey 1993; Hudson 2003). However, some artists directly deployed aesthetic strategies in the service of political ends. Felix Gonzalez-Torres worked over loss through more allusive than pictorial means, using as his art supplies piles of candy, stacks of paper, jigsaw puzzles, billboards, and strings of light that would dissipate over the course of an exhibition as viewers were invited to take a candy or unlimited edition sheet, or as lightbulbs burned out and billboards were pasted over. The temporality expressed by the work—using the time of display as a deductive frame—suggested an elegiac but also tactical response to portraying sexuality and mortality in the era of AIDS. Confronting homophobia and government censorship around obscene material, Gonzalez-Torres remarked about “*Untitled*” (*Perfect Lovers*) (1991), a pair of synchronized clocks: “Two clocks side by side are much more threatening to the powers that be than an image of two guys sucking each other’s dicks [re: Mapplethorpe], because they cannot use me as a rallying point in their battle to erase meaning” (Spector 1995, 73).

After his own untimely death from complications due to AIDS, Gonzalez-Torres was taken up as a key figure in a more international account of contemporary practice dubbed “relational aesthetics” by Nicolas Bourriaud in 1995. The key point for Bourriaud was not the artist’s engagement within US-based funding wars, nor was it a politics of identity as articulated by a gay, Cuban-born man, but rather a turn to participation (Gonzalez-Torres’s giving art away was critical to his formulation). The affective practices collected under this umbrella instantiated community within the duration of an event, exhibition, or performance. The artwork therein becomes a means to an end that is social interactions, as exemplified in *Untitled* (*Free*) (1992) by Rirkrit Tiravanija at 303 Gallery, New York, where the artist cooked rice and Thai curry and shared it with those present. There was in this convivial activity a buoyant promise; yet complicating the micro-utopianism of its hospitality was the reality that the work was naïve to the privilege of access and belonging that self-selects its audiences in the first place. This is to say, *Untitled* (*Free*) was not a soup kitchen—but it never pretended to be one, either. In 2004, Claire Bishop levied a trenchant critique of relational aesthetics as aiming at cohesion. She argued for friction instead of the solidarity of false consensus as the basis for modeling more democratic relations (Bishop 2004).

In 2009, the Guggenheim Museum, New York, mounted a retrospective addressing the participation current with an exhibition called *theanyspacewhatever* that assumed the work’s continuing relevance. Given the institutional embrace of this work since the 1990s, and the turn within museum practice to experience-generating activations of collections and programming, perhaps this was unsurprising. (Writing in relation to the Tate Modern, opened in London in 2000, but widely applicable, Seph Rodney (2019) holds that visitors were increasingly treated as self-directed clients within the modern museum as part of this new paradigm of public engagement (also see Klonk 2009; O’Neill 2012).) The Guggenheim Museum showed older work next to new, most notably Carsten Höller’s *Revolving Hotel Room* (2008), a platform bed that guests could occupy overnight in the otherwise empty museum. Even Tiravanija’s curry found its way into the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2012, when the piece was acquired and now staged with museum cafeteria staff preparing the food under strict health codes,

guards limiting access under fire safety capacity regulations, and so forth. This incorporation of seemingly playful art has more recently spawned “museum” pop-ups that, in turn, compete with museums, including an immersive Van Gogh fantasia of a room-scaled *Starry Night* (1889) and The Museum of Ice Cream, which unfurls as a series of rooms as backdrops: they exist to become selfies, an interest convergence of brand promotion for attraction and guest.

Beyond works presented in more traditional museums, by the late 1990s, an emergent global exhibition culture was encouraged by biennials spread across continents in a furtherance of world’s fairs and their ideological stakes for modernization. The earliest, the Venice Biennale, was founded in 1895 as an exhibition of Italian art, though within a decade, national pavilions appeared one-by-one (first, Belgium, followed by Hungary, Germany, Great Britain, France, and so forth. Its progeny proliferated a century later, well into the 2000s, albeit often conceived against European hegemony or genealogy as anti- or postcolonial. Just a few of these many instances include the Havana Biennial, DAK’ART, Johannesburg Biennial, Istanbul Biennial, Gwangju Biennial, Beijing Biennial, and Sharjah Biennial. Paco Barragán summarizes:

neo-liberalism [was] in full swing with the advent of low budget air companies, cheaper transports, tourism, the naissance of city branding and so on. ... And within this whole “experience economy” [characterized by the sale of memorable experiences to customers] biennials and art fairs have become the perfect tools of *soft power*, as Joseph S. Nye keenly would have argued, in the tough competition for attention (Robecchi 2021).¹³

While comprising all media, event-driven commissions for large-scale exhibitions additionally meant that there was less art to crate, insure, and ship; in place of art’s transit, artists peripatetically traveled among locales. In a version of just on-time production they could make work once on site, relating it to local concerns as imagined from where they came from, and possibly directed by whatever research they conducted in advance of arrival. Star curators, hopping from biennial to biennial, facilitated this agenda and in the process helped to grant legitimacy to new biennials and the artists they onboarded together with those already better known.¹⁴ (The latter are often promoted by a consolidating number of blue-chip galleries useful for funding production costs, transit, and other fees (see Pogrebin 2016).) Because of the continuity of talent, biennials came to relate to similar themes. These often involve globalization and its deleterious effects—some of which productively embody what Caroline Jones names “critical globalism” (Jones 2017)—even as they perpetuate them. Picking up earlier considerations of autonomy, Pamela Lee has argued that the art world cannot be deemed a world apart from the “real world” but, rather, continuous with it, as both are enmeshed in and enabling of geopolitical and economic interests (Lee 2012). And the vicissitudes of certain iterations admit the extent to which contemporary art is imbricated within capitalism and state power. Barragán also notes that many biennials have failed without buy-in from home politicians; proving this point is the Valencia Biennial, which lasted four editions, commenced by one politician and abolished by another thereafter (Robecchi 2021).

Art fairs proliferated in tandem with biennials and are at times not dissimilar from them. But art fairs are primarily profit-making enterprises. They are shopping stalls, or trade shows, that aggregate sellers (in this case, art dealers) with heterogeneous offerings—a far-rago of paintings and sculptures, photography, and multimedia work—under a literal tent. The present form premiered in Germany, in 1967, as Art Cologne. It was, in the words of Christine Mehring, a commercial experiment that was the “product neither of a booming local market nor of an easy influx of migratory foreign capital, but of a stagnant national art economy [after World War II]” (Mehring 2008, 322). This finds a parallel in the but-tressing of established fairs and the originating of others (often medium-based, niche sales

platforms, as for photography) in response to the 1990s recession, when many galleries went bankrupt or were near to doing so. Even the now-prominent Armory Show in New York started with four gallerists—Colin de Land, Pat Hearn, Matthew Marks, and Paul Morris—and launched at the Gramercy Park Hotel in 1994 as a direct response to the economic crisis. In its aftermath the successful template remained, replete with spin-off venues beside the main event, as well as gatekeeping mechanisms for exhibitors and curated projects that suggest something apart from merchandising even while serving as its apotheosis.

One-stop shopping proved a lure, offering galleries access to more clients and opportunities for celebrity-studded publicity amidst an exclusive social scene. While galleries maintained brick-and-mortar outlets, the big story of the 2000s was the dominance of art fairs, and artists' reliance on and ambivalence toward their unabashedly entrepreneurial logic (Barragán 2008). (In one terrific instance, Elmgreen and Dragset premiered *The Well Fair* at UCCA (Center for Contemporary Art) Beijing in 2016, transforming the main space into a fictional art fair with rows of rectangular booths in an updating of institutional critique, though many others have also made transactions the subject of their work, making the culture of money visible and legible.) This was true especially after 2008, with the collapse of the world's financial markets. Spaces began to close, funding diminish, and sales slacken; but then, phoenix-like, others arose even more powerfully in their place, and sales came back.¹⁵ This was thanks, in part, to the online viewing and selling of art starting with eBay in 1995 but gaining in respectability for higher-priced lots only in the 2010s, which existed in conjunction with fairs. In New York, market reorganization occurred amidst the convulsions of Occupy Wall Street, a protest movement against economic inequality and political corruption, which began in September 2011, a decade after the al-Qaeda attacks in the same neighborhood.

Despite attention to the particularities of this moment, the art fair, like the biennial, has very old roots: in religious festivals and pilgrimages, to say nothing of medieval marketplaces and French salons—or even biennials (including Venice) that functioned like art fairs by selling what was on view (Gerlis 2022). Christian Morgner summarizes its advantages as remarkably consistent with these precedents in bringing together merchants of rare goods; enabling a comparative structure for the formation of prices; and anticipating a time-line and scale of production and sale by recurring annually. These are markers of what he names a “small-world network” (Morgner 2014, 332). Lest this imply a wholly—or equitably—integrated global structure, it must be noted that galleries from non-Western countries are less well represented than their Western counterparts across the international network of art fairs, and that the work shown therein is by-and-large Western, in style if not origin. Guillaume Piens acknowledged that art fairs “need to position themselves as the venue for the discovery and promotion of a local or regional art scene to attract collectors to travel there. They cannot just be a marketplace with no real identity” (Mun-Delsalle 2016). So the trick, as with biennials, is to produce a fair with a particular local flair, all the while maintaining transnational legibility. And on the mainstage, as it were, territorial expansion happens through thematic approaches (e.g., Art Paris concentrating on Central Europe, the Middle East, and Asia) or directed sections within the overall program (e.g., the Armory Show's *Focus* selections that traverse geographies far from New York but bring them back there), perpetuating as well as exhibiting asymmetries of power.

This period likewise corresponds to the digital revolution, which also brought about an efflorescence of Internet art, art made by algorithmic programs and neural networks, and more recently, the rise and fall of NFTs (non-fungible tokens, or non-interchangeable units of data that can be sold and traded and were handy for parking crypto currency). The explosion of social media in the 2000s allowed for access to events and installations happening elsewhere. It also precipitated a reconfiguration of the art world predicated upon fluid distribution of images of art, with inventory—first shared as duplicable JPEGs, sometimes before openings to encourage advance sales—moving across borders, even when people



FIGURE 15.2 Javits Center, New York, 2021. Casey Kelbaugh / Courtesy of The Armory Show.

could not. In the course of the COVID pandemic, which began in 2020, even fairs migrated online, with virtual viewing rooms and search features for available works that included price brackets in what proved a practical step toward transparency. This was one aspect of a wholesale reconsideration of access, to say nothing of the meaning of art and its value (Velthius 2005). As travel resumed in 2022 after long-term closures, there remained a parallel embrace of archived works and shows, online programs, and openings of new exhibitions that also comprises, if unintentionally, a standpoint against ableism and for environmentalism after so much gratuitous touring.

The “Home Bias” of the “Global” Art Market

Due to this rapid shift to the virtual because of the pandemic, a wider selection of art and ancillary programming has been made public (also through individual artists putting work online directly or going live from their studios). Given this, one way to draw this chapter to a close would be to suggest the congratulatory logic of the global village, of a piece with the neocolonial parading as humanism in “It’s a Small World.” And to be sure, this strain, articulated throughout the 2010s, was often uncritical. Olav Velthius and Stefano Baia Curioni have attempted to correct this view, writing of the “celebratory notion of a global art market as a sign of ideological prejudice” (Velthius and Curioni 2015), wherein “international” becomes a selling point. They also maintain that the globalization of contemporary art markets is neither new—“art has been sold across borders and artists have lived nomadic lives from at least the Renaissance onwards, not only looking for new sources of artistic inspiration but also for new markets to sell their paintings—nor absolute—“some segments of art markets continue to operate locally or regionally, just like regional markets for television programs and movies developed after a first wave of globalization (read: Americanization) in the 1970s and 1980s” (Velthius and Curioni 2015, 6, 25). Instead, they find continuing evidence of a “home bias”—something with new relevance in the time of writing, in early 2022.

Whether we are now witnessing the end of globalism is a question hotly contested if poorly framed. Rather, we might ask whether the utility of the neocolonial conceit of the global contemporary in the first place. What histories does it carry forward? Which others does it occlude? The claims and practices of the “global” art world reflect an abiding interest in influencing people, practices, and institutions from without, and bringing them

together under the false promise of a common, if unidirectional, mission. Writing of the finale of “It’s a Small World”—where children of the world finally sing as one, amidst the amalgamating scheme of spot-lit tinsel—Laudan Nooshin describes a “surreal” effect of “shared humanity and a message of mutual tolerance” (Nooshin 2004, 237). To her point, it is easy to imagine the aspirational horizon of amity when all difference has already been elided. To conclude where we began, then, emerging from the relative darkness of an animatronic wish-fulfillment, we might not pretend to have achieved unanimity. Instead, we could recall—and actively work to undo—a persistent will to dominance. Otherwise, we are still further compelling indebtedness that cannot really be repaid.

Notes

- 1 In Immanuel Kant’s ideas put forward in the 1790 treatise, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, he attempts to reconcile how aesthetic judgments are both subjective and universal. See Kant (2000).
- 2 For one such emblematic source extrapolating from the United States and Western Europe, and only glancing at the rest of the world, see the *October* journal-authored textbook: Foster, Krauss, Bois, and Buchloh (2005).
- 3 It bears mention that it was Clement Greenberg and, arguably in a different way, Harold Rosenberg, who first elaborated the idea of the United States (as based in, or emanating from, New York) inheriting the mantle of French modernism.
- 4 Critics including Douglas Crimp, but also Hilton Kramer and Hal Foster, took issue with Barbara Rose’s 1979 survey exhibition *American Painting: The Eighties*, at New York University’s Grey Art Gallery, which insisted upon the vitality of the medium and contributed to a position defending a range of painting practices beyond those collected in this show. See Rose (1979).
- 5 See the Guerrilla Girls website at: <https://www.guerrillagirls.com>.
- 6 Isabelle Graw has developed this idea across many texts and exhibitions.
- 7 Georgina Adam (2014, 2017) extends this into the 2010s. David Joselit importantly shows how artists working outside of the Western system have used traditional culture—heritage, in his terms—to engage in a willful politics of globalization aimed at shifting Eurocentrism. See Joselit (2020).
- 8 Already in 1968, a prescient Leo Steinberg charged that “[a]vant-garde art, lately Americanized, is for the first time associated with big money. ... For far-out modernism, we can now read ‘speculative growth stock’; for apparent quality, ‘market attractiveness’; and for an adverse change of taste, ‘technical obsolescence.’ ... Art is not, after all, what we thought it was; in the broadest sense it is hard cash. ... Another decade, and we shall have mutual funds based on securities in the form of pictures held in bank vaults” (Steinberg 1972, 55–92). For background on the subject of the contemporary art market, see Stallabrass (2004); Velthuis (2005); Thompson (2008); and Griffin (2008). On the significance of the Scull sale, see the above as well as Goldman (2010); Martinique (2019).
- 9 For a notable overview of shifts in the market, also see Horowitz (2011).
- 10 One could argue that this expands on the US government’s strategies of using Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s as an agent of democracy, to be shipped abroad. See Guilbaut (1983).
- 11 Alessia Zorloni (2013) also notes the growing importance of women purchasing art.
- 12 Graw makes the point that that market value is not necessarily equivalent to symbolic value (or cultural importance). See also Graw (2020).
- 13 The term “experience economy” was first used by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore to describe the period following the service economy (which, in turn, followed the agrarian and industrial economy, respectively). See Pine and Gilmore (1999).

- 14 In this, biennials share much with museums, which also embody a “winner-take-all” approach and show the work of a shockingly small number of artists. See Zorloni and Ardizzone (2016); Kinsella (2022).
- 15 Georgina Adam has also extended a critique of market excess and manipulation to the founding of private museums, proliferating during this period; see Adam (2021). Recent writing on the topic has further stressed the financialization of art, and mechanisms by which art is lent and used as collateral, accruing value in the process, among other mechanisms of generating profit. See Shaked (2022).

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PUBLIC SPHERES

The Politics of Public Space in Postrevolutionary Iran

Talinn Grigor

In his seminal work *The Philosophy of History* (1837), Friedrich Hegel claimed that art history began with the Persian Achaemenid Empire (550–329 BCE) when humans entered continuous history (Hegel 1988, vol. 4, 48). The Iranian Plateau has been home to a sequence of superpowers, which served as critical centers for the development of both the institution of absolute monarchy and the production of art. Iran is also the birthplace of two major royal dynasties that adopted two world religions as their political ideology and one large nation state that politicized one of those religions. While the Sassanian Empire (224–651) was the center of orthodox Zoroastrianism as the religion of the vast kingdom, Safavid rulers (1501–1736) espoused Twelver Shi’a Islam as the official religion of their equally extensive territories. The former stretched from the Indus to the Nile rivers, the latter from today’s Pakistan to Syria. A mere postcolonial shadow of the former Persianate geographies and cultures, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI, established 1980) counts today as the only theocracy in the network of nation states.¹ Because the IRI has a strong history of Western-style modernization throughout the twentieth century, a look at how public space, religion, and architecture are entwined, negotiated, and discussed in the IRI provides a unique insight into broader questions about the politics of contemporary art.

The modern art history of Iran with the cross-pollination of strong monarchic and theocratic traditions that espoused state religion to shape political power throughout a vast and culturally rich and diverse territory presents a unique case wherein the qualities and conditions of what constitutes the “public sphere” and what it “does” can be examined. Diverging from a commonly Western definition and function of the public sphere, for instance, premised on German philosopher Jürgen Habermas’s conception of the rather slow historical development of first the “bourgeois public sphere” in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and then the “mass societies” of consumer capitalism in twentieth-century Europe and North America, modern Iran showcases the effects of what historians have called a rapid or uneven modernization processes that converged on and shaped urbanistic, economic, sociocultural, and artistic domains (see Habermas 1989). When, between 1598 and 1629, Shah Abbas I (reigned 1571–1629) constructed the Naqsh-e Jahan Square—the

largest public square in the early modern era—in his capital city of Isfahan, the use of the 964,000 square-foot open space had nothing to do with the Western notion of democracy or mass participation in political processes. Instead, Naqsh-e Jahan was the majestic stage upon which Safavid rulers performed and displayed their rituals of kingly absolute power. Public space was defined by and around the visibility and visuality of the king's body. Since then, the existence of a wide range of often opposing, diverging, and conflicting public opinion and social vision of the society's future had been defined by the complex processes associated with a top-down and uneven economic, infrastructural, and urban growth that transformed the Safavid, Zand, and Qajar Shi'a empires into the Pahlavi secular nation state, and since 1980, the IRI.

1925–1979: Secularization of Public Space

The twentieth century began in Iran with a constitutional revolution (1906–1911) that eventually failed and brought onto the Persian throne a modernizing but an autocratic new king, Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–1941). His reign aimed to “rebuild Iran in the image of the West” by secularizing the public sphere, educating the masses in European-style institutions, and developing the capitalist economy in novel venues of modern sociability such as cinemas, factories, department stores, and sports clubs (Abrahamian 1982, 140). Women were to enter this public domain freely and unveiled. To implement these secularist aims, Reza Shah curbed the power of the Shi'a clerics by confiscating their property, demolishing the venues for indoor Shi'a passion play performances, outlawing passion plays and processions in the streets and squares, ignoring the Shi'a right to take sanctuary in major shrines, and refusing visas to pilgrims to the sacred Muslim sites of Mecca, Medina, and Najaf in the neighboring Arab countries. Instead, the state built and promoted tourism to secular sites, such as the mausoleums of Ferdowsi (1934) in Tus, and of Hafez (1938) in Shiraz, both of which were invented sites of nationalism shaped by the new minister of culture and arts and under the auspices of the Society of National Heritage (on the secularization of historical sites, see Grigor 2009). Policies promoting national tourism to these modern sites aimed to supplant pilgrimage to venerated Shi'a shrines on the national map. In Tehran, Reza Shah's government implemented urban reforms that turned the capital city into a massive construction site; the 1860s fortifications with eleven ornate titled gates along with two-thirds of the nineteenth-century built environment were leveled. In their place, Tehran acquired large Haussmannian boulevards lined with ministries, banks, cinemas, Parisian-style cafés, and open public squares and roundabouts circling figurative statues of national heroes. By the time of Reza Shah's forced abdication by the Allies in 1941, the Tehran of the 1920s had metamorphosed into a modernist city wherein modernity could be performed and experienced. In the city's brand-new and hygienic open spaces, the large squares, the wide boulevards, the restaurants, cafés, and cinemas, and the new residential villas and apartments, the citizens of what the king had dubbed the “New Iran,” inhabited a mode of modern (life)style—i.e. from specific hairdos and fashion to American cars and appliances, from public handholding to entirely novel conceptions of socialization and sociability—which constituted the experience of being modern.

In the fine arts, the 1930s were characterized by the muffling of all forms of artistic expressions not sanctioned by the ethnonationalism championed by the state. In public architecture, extensive neoclassical facades with bull-headed columns evoked the antiquity and majesty of the ancient Persian empires of the Achaemenids and the Sassanians, while paintings and other state-sponsored fine arts reinforced Western classical forms and traditions while also encouraging Iranian artists to revive their arts and crafts in a manner faithful to Achaemenid, Sassanian, and Safavid aesthetics. However, the heavy-handed Pahlavi policies to both modernize and historicize barred artists from dabbling in cubist, surrealist,

expressionist, and abstractionist practices, which were branded by the authorities as frivolous and dangerous modes of formalism. Instead, Iranian art was defined as the foremost Iranian art critic, Karim Emami, put it, as “academic rendering, in oils or watercolors, of Iranian subject matter: family gatherings, street scenes, landscapes, and floral still lifes.”²

Furthermore, art education revolved around the newly established Faculty of Fine Arts of the Tehran University (1934), led by the beaux-arts-trained French architect André Godard. Therefore, the education of young Iranians in fine arts and architecture was exclusively based on French beaux-art pedagogy. Any traditional Iranian modes of creativity were relegated to the “inferior” category of traditional crafts. The opening of academies outside the capital city, modeled after Kamal al-Molk’s 1911 School of Applied Arts and Crafts in Tehran, produced a generation of artists trained on the French model that, Layla Diba suggests, emphasized “technical skill and replication instead of imaging, personal expression” (Diba 2013, 50). The government’s arts and crafts revival plans were reinforced when Hossein Taherzadeh Behzad split the New Arts from the Old Arts sections upon taking over the School of Applied Arts and Crafts in 1930. The Old Arts section taught students the Safavid tradition of miniature painting, illustration, carpet, and tile works. There was nothing new about the New Arts section; it included academic painting and sculpture in the direct footsteps of Kamal al-Molk. Nevertheless, as Diba explains, European art critics raved about “the formal and design qualities of traditional Persian art” and argued for its “superior” status in relation to any contemporary Western art, which convinced Iranian artists to continue to revive older modes to the detriment of unrestricted artistic experimentations and innovations (Diba 2013, 50).

Between Reza Shah’s exile in 1941 by the Allies and the 1953 overthrow of Prime Minister Mosaddeq by the US and UK intelligence agencies (the CIA and MI6, respectively), Iranian society experienced “a famously contested and vibrant period” that facilitated subversive artistic expressions, including an Iranian brand of surrealism working under the name of the Fighting Cock Society for the Arts (Khakpour 2016). The intelligentsia that formed this association regarded the artist as a public activist, describing “the role of the artist fusing with that of the poet, the long-standing conscience of Iranian society” (Balaghi 2002, 31). This movement was followed by a period dominated by the various activities of the abstract expressionists and the neo-traditionalist *Saqqakhaneh* School, who showcased their works during the five Tehran Biennales, led by Marcos Grigorian from 1958 to 1966. Finally, under the auspices of the cultural foundation of Empress Farah Pahlavi (r. 1959–1979), the wife of Reza Shah’s son and successor, Mohammad Reza Shah (r. 1941–1979), the Shiraz Art Festivals (1967–1977) brought international avant-garde artists to the Iranian public in such venues as the ancient terrace of Persepolis or the open-air mausoleum of Hafez. Described as “the most controversial trajectory of cultural attitude, policy, and intercultural contact in modern Iranian history,” the festivals cast ancient Zoroastrian and medieval Muslim sites into the secular public sphere as national markers of Iranian high culture (Mhalouji 2013, 87). As the state commissioned urban megaprojects while tightening its grip on public utterances of dissent, individual artists—for instance, Ahmad Aali, Bahman Mohassess, and Nicky Nojumi—depicted in their artworks the suffocating atmosphere of political control (see Daftari and Diba, 105, 166–181).

When the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMoCA; designed by architect Kamran Diba) opened its doors to the public in 1977, it boasted US\$2.5 billion worth of modern and contemporary art. The 1973 quadrupling of oil price had made it possible for the Iranian public to see and own outstanding pieces by Iranian artists as well as those by Picasso, Braque, Pollock, Lichtenstein, Magritte, Miró, Duchamp, and Warhol. TMoCA became the elite heart of Pahlavi avant-garde culture: from its well-chosen site to its vernacular-modernist building, from its breathtaking collection to its various facilities, public programs, and academic curricula. It housed all the activities that had been traditionally linked with an important cultural institution, over and above the latest trends in art practice and

pedagogy: permanent and temporary exhibitions, biennials for all media, the screening of films, performances, academic lectures and workshops, casual cocktail parties, and official gatherings. It was ranked among the top ten museums worldwide that had been expressly erected to house contemporary art (see Dehghan 2012, 4–5). On the opening night on October 14, 1977, however, a grassroots revolution was at its doorstep—and one that questioned the ethos and aesthetics of everything TMoCA represented for the ruling Iranian elite.

1979–1997: Islamization of Public Space

As the special correspondent for *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Michel Foucault landed in Tehran amid the protests and described the Iranian Revolution of 1977–1979 as the much-desired “spirit of a world without spirit” (Foucault, Kritzman, and Sheridan 1988). With a rather ignorant, Eurocentric tone, which Rosemarie Scullion termed “knee-jerk anti-modernist,” Foucault laid a romantic argument in a defense of the revolution, wherein he foregrounded the spiritual and aesthetic qualities of the mass revolt; despite his insight into the practices of coercive power, he was blind to the fundamentalist implications, especially for ethnic, religious, and gender minorities, of a system governed by the clergy (Scullion 1995, 19). In objection to the autocratic rule of the Pahlavi king, a regime that had by then sutured the *image* of the avant-garde to that of an absolutist monarchy, the urban population persistently stepped into the large boulevards carved out by his father. They gathered in open squares and roundabouts, for instance, the Shahyad Museum Tower (1971 designed by Hossein Amanat) in western Tehran, which Mohammad Reza Shah had commissioned for the 2,500th-anniversary celebrations of the Persian monarchy in 1971. The contestation of public space was itself an act of revolt. Secular edifices, such as statues, museums, banks, cafés, cinemas, and specific structures, such as Persepolis, Reza Shah’s mausoleum, and Mohammad Reza Shah’s Sadabbad Palace, were systematically vandalized in contempt of the ruling elite.

The quintessential marker of Pahlavi middle-class values was perhaps the movie theater, and an overwhelming number of them were burned down. In one of the most significant terrorist attacks globally, Abadan’s Rex Cinema was torched by Islamist arsonists in 1978, killing some 400 spectators. The art deco and international style vocabularies of cinemas had for four decades enabled secular modes of sociability; in a country of 35 million, 110 million movie tickets had been sold in the year when the revolution started (see Abrahamian 1982, 428). From their first appearances in urban centers in the 1930s, movie theaters, along with the film industry, had been condemned by the Shi’a clergy. The high-ranking conservative cleric Shaykh Fazlollah Nuri had equated cinemas with “sleeping potion” or a “fatal, killer disease” (Naficy 1992; also see Balaghi n.d., 49–52). In the 1940s, Mojtaba Navab-Safavi, the head of the radical Islamist movement *Fedaiyan-e Islam*, similarly condemned cinemas as “a ‘smelting furnace,’ which melts away all the wholesome values and virtues of a Muslim society” (quoted in Naficy 1992, 179). The most vocal among them, Ayatollah Khomeini, insisted that cinemas and other secular sites “rape the youth of our country and stifle in them the spirit of virtue and bravery” (quoted in Naficy 1992, 179–180).

Against the pristine white backdrop of modernist architecture such as that of the Shahyad Museum, protest slogans and graffiti began to furnish the public sphere with the iconography of first leftist politics and later Shi’a theology. From summer 1978 to the spring of 1979, Iranians once more experienced a few months of “free political environment” during which all ideological expressions could occur openly in the public space, streets, and squares. Fine arts students, photographers (such as Abbas, Rana Javadi, Bahman Jalali, and Kaveh Golestan), graphic designers (such as Morteza Momayez, Hasan Ismailzadeh, and Arpik Baghdasarian), and muralists (such as Nilufar Qadarinejad and Iraj Eskandari) were at the forefront of populating the walls of cities with anti-royalist street art. Many among them

were women. The early murals were created in socialist realist style and placed at eye level, mixing Shi'a iconography with Soviet, Chinese, Cuban, and Mexican revolutionary artistic repertoires. The Pahlavi state had for decades stifled public political expressions challenging Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, particularly those coming from leftist movements such as the Communist Tudeh Party. In the power vacuum opened up by the 1977–1978 popular uprising, the radicalized segment of the Shi'a clerical establishment would step into power. Despite having the fifth largest army in the world at his disposal, the king curbed his generals and went into exile in January 1979. Two weeks later, Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile as the head of a now Shi'a revolution.

A referendum held in the following April ratified the Islamic Republic by 99% of the popular vote. A cultural revolution followed suit when, in June 1980, the Ayatollah formed the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. Its goal: to substitute Pahlavi secularism, one that both kings had cultivated since 1925, with an Islamic-Shi'a dominion. Its first target: the optics of public space, wherein the new government replaced royal icons, statues, names, figures, and institutions with Muslim ones. "The Islamic Republic views itself as the authentic embodiment of pure Islam;" notes the leading historian of modern Iran, Ervand Abrahamian, adding that it "is highly conscious of the political potency of rituals, images, symbols, and language; and claims to reject all Western concepts, especially those of humanism, socialism, feminism, and the most insidious of all, Marxism" (Abrahamian 1993, 60). Viewed as tightly married to the *ancien régime*, all forms of avant-garde art came under attack. All state museums, including TMoCA, were first closed and defunded, and then brought under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, a fusion of the prerevolutionary Ministry of Culture and Art and the Ministry of Information and Tourism. This new ministry was now responsible for overseeing not only Iran's cultural heritage but more importantly the moral implications and interpretations of the arts. In like manner, the Fine Arts Faculty of Tehran University was shut down, while most prominent artist-architects, including Grigorian, Diba, Hushang Seyhun, Parviz Tanavoli, Massoud Arabshahi, Hossein Kazemi, and Nasser Ovissi, followed the royal family into exile.

If Pahlavism had promoted a modern middle-class environment of cosmopolitanism wherein some of the well-known artists came from Iran's religious minorities (Armenian and Assyrian Christians, Jews, Bahais, and Zoroastrians), the IRI homogenized the art scene by promoting artists who not only were Shi'a but supported the Islamization of the Iranian public sphere. The dictatorship of secularism and cosmopolitanism under the Pahlavis had opened a public space for non-Muslim artists to join the modernist artistic mainstream; the establishment of the IRI as a theocracy was to enable religious minorities to participate in public life through the sanctity that Islam bestows on Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity as the pre-Islamic People of the Book. In contrast, founded in Iran in 1863 and therefore rejecting the Muslim belief of Prophet Mohamed as the seal of all prophets, the Bahai Faith had no place in the IRI.

The Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988)—considered the longest and the bloodiest conventional conflict between two states since WWII and the most brutal between two Muslim societies in history—further radicalized the arts and held them hostage to religious, political, and ideological priorities. While Iraq's dictator, Saddam Hussein, took advantage of the revolutionary chaos to invade Iran with the hope of placing Iraq as the regional superpower, Ayatollah Khomeini seized the opportunity to export his Islamic revolution by prolonging the war. Eight years and half a million casualties later, the Iranian economy was in ruin, resulting in neither reparation nor border change. The so-called War of the Cities, which brought the violence to populated urban centers, involved some 5,000 artillery and missile attacks by Iraq on civilian and historical Iranian heritage sites. Saddam deployed mostly Western weapons; Iran, sanctioned by the West, fought back with a steady supply of poorly armed and trained volunteers, including boy soldiers. To keep the volunteers coming, Iranian public and urban spaces were saturated with propaganda art in a primarily populist,

socialist realist style that incorporated Shi'a iconography, which glorified martyrdom, Ayatollah Khomeini's guardianship, and the struggle for Jerusalem. They came in easily reproducible and disseminatable forms: small media (videos, letters, brochures, and newsletters), feature films, posters, stamps, murals, and billboards that steered Shi'a nationalism and marshaled the masses to the battlefield. Art in public was tasked to reinforce the state's narrative on a Shi'a revolution, an Islamic republic, and a "Holy Defense."

IRI's most representative and visible form of postrevolutionary public art remains the urban mural (Figure 16.1). Large, conspicuous, colorful, dramatic, and populist, these murals came under the patronage of the wealthy and powerful foundations, such as the Foundation of the Oppressed, heir to the Pahlavi Foundation; the Army of the Revolutionary Guards and the Jerusalem Force that replaced the Imperial Guards; the Martyr's Foundation; the Mobilization Foundation; the Housing Foundation; the Foundation of War Refugees; and the Pilgrimage Foundation. The amateur artists they commissioned created forms characterized as Islamic socialist realism embedded with Shi'a symbolism. At eye level, unsigned and horizontal murals of the free political environment gave way to their official patronage by the state and the foundation. Signed and stamped on a vertical configuration, they were now placed on the upper part of the blind multistory walls of high-rises, highly visible and untouchable.



FIGURE 16.1 Martyrdom mural depicting a 12-year-old boy soldier facing Iraqi tanks while Ayatollah Khomeini is hovering above him. Sponsored by the Foundation of Martyrs, central Tehran, ca. 1988. Photo: author, 1993.

The IRI murals have an art history that now stretches over four decades, and can be grouped in four original and several subsequent thematic categories: (1) the imperial-colonial enemy with such common inscriptions as “death to the king,” “death to America”; (2) the representation of the guardianship of the Islamic jurist (*velayat-e faqih*) as the spiritual and political supreme leader of the IRI, depicting the portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and his current successor Ayatollah Khamenei; (3) the Iranian revolutionary tradition going back to the nineteenth century and its export to other Muslim lands; (4) Shi’a martyrdom and the veterans of the war with Iraq (see Grigor 2014, 21–92). Martyrdom-related forms of public art, be it murals, posters, stamps, sculptures, or architecture, all bore witness to the state’s effort to validate the loss of half a million Iranians in a conflict between two Muslim states. With the aim of persuading the domestic audience, martyrdom art was displayed in both urban centers away from the battlefields as well as on the frontline to convey a critical message: Shi’a martyrdom is the highest form of sacrifice and leads to the highest reward. The propagandistic purpose of martyrdom art sought to explain (away) the longevity, brutality, and futility of a ruinous war between two Muslim peoples. In the 1990s, however, things began to change; the war had ended and Ayatollah Khomeini had passed away. Under the postwar reconstruction program of President Rafsanjani from 1989 to 1997, the notion of “beauty” (*ziba*), a part of his postwar “reconstruction” (*baz-sazi*), was foregrounded by the state, and many art schools and academies were launched. The fifth category of murals was introduced and consisted of moral proclamations such as “god sees everything” and “let us endeavor to be truthful,” inscribed on solid backgrounds in bold calligraphic letters.

The end of the devastating war with Iraq in 1988 altered the ideological role of the state campaign dubbed “the imposed war,” or more commonly, the Holy Defense. The end of the war also meant that the state discourse on martyrdom shifted from the frontline to the cultural arena, including the museum. The central ethos of martyrdom was historicized by establishing a Shi’a pilgrimage network of martyrdom cemeteries, martyrdom museums, martyrdom shrines, roadside mosques, and the Holy Defense tourist sites. In Ray, southern Tehran, Ayatollah Khomeini’s opulent and vast mausoleum complex (designed by Mohammad Tehrani, started in 1989 and ongoing) flanked the expansive cemetery called the Behesht-e Zahra (Paradise of Zahra; Figure 16.2). The combined grounds of the cemetery and the



FIGURE 16.2 (Option A): Two memorials on the grounds of Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery commemorating the martyrdom of Iranians during the Iran–Iraq War, in Ray, southern Tehran, the late 1990s. Photo: author, 1997.

mausoleum provide space for a wide range of public life—various religious, cultural, educational, and commercial activities on its vast, 20-square-kilometer grounds. Despite the continuous constructions, it houses the tomb proper with all its amenities, a large shopping mall, a tourist and cultural center, a university for Islamic studies, and a theology college. Aside from tourism, it accommodates the Ramadan and Ashura Shi'a morning rituals, May Day celebrations, the staging of Shi'a passion plays, Friday prayers, and the commemoration of various national and religious events. Through its architectural pastiche of medieval and post-modern forms (neo-Timurid domes and minarets juxtaposed to contemporary pyramidal volumes), materials (poured reinforced concrete, longitudinal steel trussing, multi-glazed tiling, gilding), and diverse programming (religious, educational, commercial), the public and the private are blurred. The sacred is drawn into the domain of profane: mourning intersects with leisure, pilgrimage with window-shopping, and family outings with prayer.

While the revolution and the war were memorialized in urban centers through the establishment of martyrdom museums, including Tehran's Museum of Holy Defense (2004–2013), in 1997 the state launched the Caravan of Light (*Rahian-e Nur*) within the network of existing centers of Shi'a pilgrimage and worship (see Rajabi 2014; Breu 2016; Van der Made 2017; Berg 2020; Vanzan 2020). Consisting of a network of battlefields, memorials, cemeteries, mosques, and shrines in south and southwestern Iran, it brings the relatives of those who died during the war to the war zone each spring. In 2005, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei officialized its patronage by forming the Foundation for the Preservation and Publication of Sacred Defense Works. War murals, billboards, monuments, and statues that have otherwise lost their vigor outside martyrdom museums in urban centers, continue to exercise their politico-religious potency through this war tourism. Here, at such sites as Shalamcheh Martyrs Memorial (Figure 16.3), Arvand Kenar Memorial, and Khorramshahr's Museum of War, the IRI maintains its hegemony on the wider narratives of the war for the thousands of domestic and foreign tourists.



FIGURE 16.3 War tourists visiting the Shalamcheh Martyrs Memorial, west of Khorramshahr on the Iraqi border, near Basra. Sonia Sevilla/Wikimedia Commons.

1997–2022: Contestation of Public Space

President Khatami's landslide election in 1997 launched a new era of openness where artists were placed at the vanguard of reform. His government placed "beautification" (*ziba-sazi*) at the center of civil society reform. He appointed liberal-minded officials to important posts and they, in turn, brought TMOCA back to the public through a series of major exhibitions, showcasing the masterpieces of Western art history that had been safely kept in the storage vault since 1978. The 1998 public display of 400 masterpieces of Western art from TMOCA's own permanent collection was followed by regular yearly exhibitions of Iranian photography (2002), abstract expressionism (2003), British sculpture (2004), Gerhard Richter (2004), and Japanese art (2005).

During these same years, a sixth mural theme, urban beautification, moved away from socialist realism, instead foregrounding abstract and optically playful compositions and colors. The loosening of access to public space also helped encourage the development of street art, graffiti art, and underground media. The visual artist Alone/*Tanha* (pseudonym of Karan Reshad), for instance, was one of the first practitioners of street art when he began at age eleven; from that point, his work, like that of Banksy, was anonymous, spontaneous, publicly visible, and avant-garde. In stark contrast to the socialist realist murals pervasive on Iranian public walls, Alone's small-scale and on-the-run graffiti art was a radical way to destabilize, in tiny lethal doses, the revolutionary message and medium of state-sanctioned art.

Khatami's liberal government also launched a campaign of rapprochement with Iranian diasporic communities by inviting artists and architects to return to Iran and resume their artistic works. Famed sculptor Parviz Tanvoli and painter and muralist Massoud Arabshahi returned to Iran to serve as outstanding examples, as artists and teachers, to the next eager generation of Iranian artists; the state saw them as a reformist partner in the future of the nation. New museums and galleries were opened to the public, while neglected or damaged public artworks were restored. For instance, Kamran Diba's modernist reinforced-concrete cube-within-a-cube *Prayer House* (1978) was restored to its original form and function after having served as a storage room since the revolution. The opening of the country's doors to the international community occasioned exilic and diasporic voices to form public spaces in and of Iran.

Since then, Iranian diasporic artists, their work now a staple in mainstream North American and European museums and art markets, have recreated their version of Iranian public space from exile (see Balaghi and Gumpert 2002; Daftari et al. 2006; Keshmirshakan 2013; Grigor 2014, 163–240). The younger generation of these artists, many of whom have never seen Iran and others who grew up in the IRI and are now in either state- or self-imposed exile and incorporate specific public spaces, iconic monuments, or distinct architectural fragments into their contemporary artworks to negotiate an exilic conception of Iranian public space. Even if one has never seen it, the longing for one's homeland translates into works that recreate an exilic conception of Iran—Iran imagined from elsewhere. In as early as 1982, for example, Sonia Balassanian predicted the spatial outcome of the Iran–Iraq War and projected the image of what would become a reality at the Behest-e Zahra cemetery in her installation in New York's Franklin Furnace. Standing rods depicted the rows of graves of young Iranians, except in Balassanian's work, the photographs of soldiers were replaced with her veiled portrait, speaking to both the mandatory veiling of women and their status as unrepresented victims of the war. Mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters lost loved ones without the state-provided benefits and visibility bestowed on male fighters.

Other works, including Mitra Tabrizian's *Tehran '06* (2006), Mehdi Farhadian's *Bridge of Rain* (2008), and Asad Faulwell's *Pillars: Iran 1882–1989* (2009), challenged the hegemonic Shi'a conception of public space by the IRI. In them, iconic structures were appropriated to

construct a different, at times diasporic, secular, and spiritual meaning of these edifices and their relevance to Iranians at large. For instance, in Negar Ahkami's *Bridge to Nowhere* (2009), a distant and burning Shahyad/Azadi Tower, the main signifier of Tehran, is bridged with an austere New York urban landscape. The female figure on the bridge, perhaps the artist herself, looks alone and bewildered, hovering somewhere between home and exile. Shahyad/Azadi Tower, Milad Tower (2007), and other landmarks in Tehran also reappeared in Mamali Shafahi's *Freedom* (2008) and Siamak Filizadeh's *Rostam II Returns at Age of 30 Having Been Brought up Abroad* (2009). Finally, Shoja Azari's *Icon* series (2010) went to the heart of both Shi'a symbolism and iconography as well as collective space and memory. Appropriating the aesthetic conventions of Shi'a posters mass-produced in the IRI, his video pieces include Shi'a saints and occupy the same sites, such as Karbala. Nevertheless, the venerated figures have transformed into female figures, genderbending and thus problematizing the exclusion of women from war and martyrdom narratives in the IRI.

More recently, Filizadeh's *Underground* series (2014) returns to the artistic technique of criticizing despotic rule by depicting bygone eras, events, and figures in pivotal moments in Iranian public time and space. In an outstanding Qajar (r. 1789–1925) translation of contemporaneity, he recast scenes from Naser al-Din Shah's coronation to his assassin's execution in the language of contemporary art, commenting on Iranian continuities, ruptures, and transformed traditions of public space from the fall of the Safavids to today. Transfiguring the interiors of the Shi'a shrine of Shah Abdol-Azim (ninth to nineteenth centuries) in Ray, the king's 1896 assassination "is envisioned like a scene from an action film and with elements inspired by the 1999 American science fiction film, *The Matrix*. However, the two main sections, in which the assassin and the shah each are propelled backward, were photographed separately and then digitally united" (Komaroff 2018, 100). By the strategy of this kind of artistic appropriation of public space (as well as historical collective time), artists contest the very nature of public engagement in the IRI. It is as if, from their sites underground, they intervene in and thus challenge the function of contemporary art in public.

The politics of public space further unfolds on the stage of cultural heritage and its ownership, management, preservation, and collective meanings. Cultural heritage itself has become a battleground through which the very definition of religious and national identity is debated, negotiated, and at times cohoused. Significant historical Shi'a sites, such as Imam Reza Imam Shrine in Mashhad and Fatima Masumeh Shrine and Jamkaran Mosque in Qom, receive ample state and private patronage with the solid support of the Shi'a theological and clerical institutions in addition to vibrant pilgrimage and tourist industries. Pre-Islamic historical sites, most of which were erected by the Zoroastrian Achaemenid and Sassanian rulers, and which were valorized and upheld by Pahlavi kings as the authentic markers of Iranian collective identity, have witnessed an ambivalent attitude from the different governments of the IRI. The contestation of public space forces specific readings of these historical sites in terms of contemporary Shi'a collective identity. While during the revolution rumors spread that the revolutionaries were at the gate of Persepolis planning to destroy the internationally prized ruins, the Khatami administration, under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), was instrumental in bringing to the public an inclusive discourse on the preservation of Iran's architectural heritage. In 1979, only three sites—i.e. the Elamite complex of Chogha Zanbil (1250 BCE), the Achaemenid ceremonial capital of Persepolis (515–330 BCE), and the Safavid urban fabric of Naqsh-e Jahan Square—were included among the Iranian UNESCO list of World Heritage sites. Within the first year of Khatami's presidency, six historical sites were nominated for UNESCO's State Party's Tentative List; five were pre-Islamic.³ Thirty-six additional natural and cultural sites were placed on the list by the start of the contested presidential election of 2009.

As Ali Mozaffari (2016, 2) has noted, due to the "conflicting political discourses, particularly at State level, between nationalism and Islamism," cultural heritage sites have turned

into contested public spaces (also see Mozaafari 2015, 2017). Such significant archaeological sites as the tomb of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenids Empire, and its administrative center of Pasargadae, where he was buried, for instance, generate significant “socio-political tensions” Mozaafari (2014, 19) because the various state, private, international, academic, and civilian agents and entities engage them as if they are contested public spaces. Mozaafari (2014) also notes: “Since 2008, a growing number of people have been gathering around the tomb to celebrate” (18) the Persian Zoroastrian new year (*nowruz*), while “chanting ... nationalist slogans or reciting poetry which was perceived as politically sensitive or the occasional prostrating at the foot of the tomb that had offended religious sensibilities” (8). The religious yet non-Islamic sites, including those of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian (excluding archaeological sites like Pasargadae and Persepolis) communities, have likewise received state patronage and protection.

Because of its commitment to Islam’s sanctity as a governing ideology where the heritage of the People of the Book holds religious significance, the IRI has cared for the Armenian Christian sites within its border under the auspices of the ICHHTO. In 2008, the fortified monasteries of Saint Thaddeus and Saint Stepanos (construction period seventh to seventeenth centuries) as well as the Chapel of Saint Mary (1314) in Dzordzor, northwestern Iran, joined UNESCO’s World Heritage list, under the umbrella of “Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran.”⁴ In stark contrast, the IRI’s northern neighbor, the former-Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, has since the mid-1990s undertaken a successful cultural erasure campaign against any evidence of Armenian heritage in the historically Armenian-populated regions of Nakhijevan and Nagorno-Karabagh, targeting especially Armenian churches, monasteries, cemeteries, and the built environment (see Maranci 2020; Ambartsumian 2021; Maghakyan 2021). In 2020, in the year of the forty-day asymmetrical war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabagh, UNESCO further added the “Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran” to the list of its Intangible Cultural Heritage, while the IRI printed an official stamp with the image of Saint Thaddeus monastery. These non-Muslim religious sites and their embrace in the Islamic state’s heritage industry open secondary public spaces exclusive to non-Muslims within the broader Iranian public sphere. In many ways, they help reinforce the hierarchical socio-spatial boundaries between the majority/Shi’ites and the minority/non-Muslims while at the same time proving the protective public domain of intercommunal spaces in which minorities continue to live *as* Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. The melting pot of Pahlavi secularism wherein social mobility was enabled through a willingness to perform avant-garde aesthetics is now replaced with the hegemony of Shi’a populism that segregates and protects its religious minorities as unique, yet other.

The extent to which a religious ethos has absorbed the discourse of and engagement with public space in the IRI is evidenced in the ongoing fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The country with one of the highest proportions of coronavirus casualties, the IRI launched a campaign to fight COVID-19 with the same hyper-visual techniques as those used during the Iran–Iraq War and the postwar Reconstruction Period. Those entities and individuals—overwhelmingly drawn from the spheres of science, medicine, and public health—have been called the Defenders of Health (Schwartz and Gözl 2020). In the “government’s insistence on portraying the battle against the coronavirus as the latest in a long line of crises confronting the Islamic Republic,” the state produced and disseminated thousands of posters that juxtapose and overlap photographs, images, and icons from the Holy Defense of 1980–1988 with the fight against COVID-19. On the site of the Office of the Supreme Leader, these posters revealed a sophisticated visual strategy that, literally, blends and blurs the iconography of the war and the global struggle against a virus: soldiers and their mothers from the 1980s share the same pictorial frame with contemporary doctors, scientists, and nurses. At the crucial moment when the IRI had lost its discursive hold on its people, the public space was being engaged with a new aesthetics of the old religious struggle, the new imagery of an old Holy Defense.

Notes

- 1 Persianate is a term proposed by world historian Marshall Hodgson for the societies that came under Persian linguistic, literary, and artistic influence. See Hodgson (1974).
- 2 See exhibition catalogues, Emami (1965, 1967).
- 3 See Iran's State Party's Tentative List, available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ir>, accessed on May 15, 2023.
- 4 See UNESCO reports on "Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran," available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1262>, accessed on May 15, 2023 and "Armenian monastic ensembles (Iran) No 1262," available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1262/documents>, accessed on May 15, 2023.

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(ANTI-)CAPITALISM

The Imminent Promise and Fear of a Getaway Car

Raqs Media Collective

Comrade Crow, choose your flamingo. Choose your time. Fly.

(Raqs Media Collective 2010)¹

An Allegory About Time Under Capital

You have other plans. You have a getaway car.

You're on a roll, aren't you?

Your rearview mirror is so badly askew that you see far ahead whenever you look behind you.

There's no escaping the future when you pursue the past.

Now try saying that in your head the other way round (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

There is a story waiting to be told in numbers, and in two kinds of getaway cars. It's about art, and dissensus, and the sense of being valued. And like all stories, whether about rising temperatures or falling expectations or rolling bulldozers or shortening breath, it's a story about capital. That is why this text is a work-in-interruption, punctuated by voices from another work, *The Capital of Accumulation* (Raqs Media Collective 2010; see Figure 17.1), which listened to the ghost of Rosa Luxemburg to unravel the jagged ways of the accumulation of capital. There are other kinds of possession as well: of texts by works, of the anticipation of works yet to be, and of seepage from works undone. Each such moment is a strike at time.

There is a moment in our work, *Strikes at Time* (see Figure 17.2), in which we find ourselves at the industrial-post-industrial edge of our city, Delhi, in a time that could be twilight, as much as it could be dawn. It's 2011.

A man, who could be a worker building one of the city's metro lines, is still wearing a hard hat and reflective safety vest, with an intriguingly blue face, as if a god trying to disguise himself. He walks that twilight, trailed by a white Maruti Omni van with a luminous outline. This is a box-like car that transports people, and odds and ends, from anywhere to mostly anywhere. The car meanders, tracing patterns of light in the deepening blue twilight. A travel disobeying the rules of destination, and of its function in time.²



FIGURE 17.1 Raqs Media Collective, *The Capital of Accumulation*, 2010. Diptych video still. NEW.



FIGURE 17.2 Raqs Media Collective, *Strikes at Time*, 2011. Production still. NEW.

Eleven billion tons of “things” sail the oceans each year by ship. And each year, a little more than 11 billion tons of “things” travel on trucks in the United States alone. How much would be traveling, in how many railway wagons, how many Maruti Omni pick up vans, trucks, and airplane cargo holds, down how many railway lines, highways, roads, streets, dirt tracks, airline routes, and ship lines, all over the planet?³

Capital needs a swifter wobble about the planetary axis, shorter seasons, brief lunch breaks, a snappier interval between one working day and another, something more pliable than that slow, variable capital, that wet mass called humans (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

In our lifetime, the idea of capitalism had first and foremost to do with mobility, with people, and things, becoming mobile, and agile. In India, from the mid-1970s onwards, the first industrial product to be sold as a “dream” to the population was an automobile, a “people’s car” imagined by a princeling, the rising son of a prime minister flirting with

tyranny (see Tripathi 2015; Jaffrelot and Pratinav 2021; Business Standard n.d.). His dream bubble took shape under the shadow of the internal Emergency of 1975–1977, when fundamental rights were suspended, and when the republic virtually became a vast preventive detention camp featuring a side business in demolition and forced sterilization.⁴ But, regardless of what happened, there was always that promise—of a car. A favorite slogan of the time was “the nation is on the move.” We all had to be going somewhere.

Like things conjured under dictatorships, the “people’s car” was a potent image lacking substance. It took a return to elections, the fall of governments, motions of confidence and no-confidence, and an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the Indian state and a Japanese car manufacturer (Suzuki) for the “people’s car” (named “Maruti” after the Hindu monkey god, swift son of the wind) to find its assembly line.

The Maruti-Suzuki 800, compact, lightweight, and relatively inexpensive, available against monthly installments and easy finance, made the “everyman” imagine a whole new culture of goods and services available to them.⁵ The car was the world. The world was this car. It felt new, and global, and oriental, and exotic, and high tech—all at the same time. It was not just a means of locomotion but also a capacity to be moved toward the idea of a new dawn (for a personal narrative on the possession of the Maruti, see Khurana n.d.).

Almost a quarter of a century later, in 2005, an even smaller car, the Nano, a diminutive hybrid dream cross-pollinated between a state-capitalist potentate—“the Left Front”—and India’s oldest industrial “family”—the Tatas—led to yet another automobile production fantasia, in the state of West Bengal, to be sold at the discounted retail rate of US\$1,000 per car. There was just one hurdle. The factory, to stand, needed to displace the very peasants who had benefited most from the Left Front’s land reform policies, and who had been its most faithful voters. They had handed the apparatchiks of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and its less significant “Front” allies more than three and a half uninterrupted decades in office. The choice was between factory and farmland. And the farmers were in no mood to be shoved off their fertile ground (IANS 2016).

And so, the peasants spoke their mind. They wouldn’t give up their land. Three decades of “left” power erupted in brutal police and party militia attacks on bewildered peasants who had been the party’s most committed voters.⁶ The party and its regime could see nothing but a conspiracy to deindustrialize the region. The farmers—the party’s former followers in the fertile farmlands—caught the scent of betrayal and turned their back on the politics that they had helped build. And that smaller than small car, the Nano, sped away to the other end of the country, to Gujarat in western India, to bolster another mirage of seamless production. (On the nature of mobility of capital and the relationship of multiple institutions, see Raqs Media Collective 2015).

Can the relations that we desire be written in terms of addition and subtraction? Unravel a productivity index and you get plenty of detail. Eyestrain, repetitive stress injury, the toxicity of mercury, the shortening of breaks and the intrusion of the supervisor ... You also get daydreams, chitchat, gossip, rumours, the thousandfold daily mutinies and routine skirmishes between desire and order. A little more voltage in the soul to combat the exhaustion of the body, and then again some more. Who has ever measured “revoltage”? (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

Meanwhile, in the hinterland of Delhi, at the Maruti factory in Manesar, a new kind of worker strode on to the shop floor. Dexterous with new technology, assertive of dignity, capable, in many instances, of transcending the old divisions of birth and tongue, caste and cuisine, prayer and pride. Alongside, as Maruti-Suzuki’s grip on the small car sector loosened with global competition, the need to maximize the extraction of surplus value increased

sharply. This meant an intensification of automated processes, and a speeding up of the assembly line. By 2011, inside the factory at Manesar, the most pronounced, the most vocal conflicts between labor and capital were over time, speed, and exhaustion.

Repeatedly, over a year, workers refused to leave the factory at the end of their shifts, “de-occupying” the shopfloor to wrest it from management control—for a few days, a week, ten days—opening the space for leverage for negotiating managerial deferrals. One day in 2012, things broke down when a worker was abused by a supervisor because he had asked for a loo break. Fatigue turned to rage. Workers charged on the building, the cars, the machines, the glass cubicles of managers. It was a riot. A human resources manager choked in the fumes and did not recover. Other factory workers started rallying by not leaving their factories. A commando unit was posted in Manesar.⁷ Maruti’s chief executive officer, the head of the company, surmised that class war had set in. The heady fantasies of speed and comfort that had emanated from India look dented (Sengupta 2011; Singh and Sarda 2015).

The long process of imprisonment and bail hearings started, and 150 workers were arrested as instigators and participants, while many more retrenched. Prosecution lawyers had argued in the courts, and in the media, that the sentiment of investment had to be saved. Finally, with the trial, sixteen workers were given a life sentence.⁸

We are all numbers today. A datum, a statistic, a measure. How many are we? How much of ourselves are we? How deficient or how much in excess are we? (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

Within three decades the acceleration of capital as movement had hit a speed bump. The car turned rusty, missed parts, started, stopped, and started again. Mobility is a matter of negotiated intermittence.

The Insignificance, or Significance, of Minuscule Fractions

How discontinuous, how surprising, how interrupted, how asynchronous, how mysterious, how quixotic things have been. And there’s no accounting for contingencies, either—for the perversity of protagonists distributed all across the mud flats of time, nourishing themselves on signs of life drowned in the water. Flamingos getting russet by the hour as they feed (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

Art, the stuff that moves the world, and moves around the world, is a minuscule fraction of the value of all that gets produced in the world. That value, which is sometimes called “Gross World Product” (GWP), the combined gross national product of all the countries in the world, was calculated as being something around US\$87.5 trillion in 2019, a little before the global COVID-19 pandemic slowed things down, just a little. Exactly ninety-nine years before 2019, in 1920, when the world was still emerging from the Great War and the Spanish flu, the value of GWP had hovered around US\$1.7 trillion. This means that in the time it took, from 1920 to 2019, for a year less than a century to pass, the value of things produced in the world rose by US\$86 trillion. This is what the last hundred years look like (for the world GWP figure for 1920, see DeLong n.d.).

A significant proportion of the approximately 3.65 billion people on Earth who are currently of working age (about 50% of the total population of roughly 7.3 billion people) are making many more things, and much more value, than all that has ever been made since homo became sapiens in the Savannah. Capital moves and mobilizes the human through varying intensities of breakdowns, grandiosities, abandonments, and fecundities. Fueled, felled, possessed, discarded, given to many addictions to alertness, humans keep alive and tend to getaway vehicles. This is also what the last hundred years have been like. (For figures of the world’s working population, see Ritchie and Roser 2022).

The trajectory of art in India has ranged from the nervous excitement of auctions in the 1990s (shot through with anxiety of the banishment of its best-known artist⁹), to the whirlwind of the 2000s (alongside a proliferation of artist-led infrastructures), to the slowing down in the second decade of the twenty-first century (though also an effervescence of micro-actions of collective initiatives by artists), and to the pandemic-induced troubles of today as we waken from quarantines (and search to suture broken conversations).

A crate with a work of art that we have made gets loaded on to a Maruti Omni van that waits at the mouth of the narrow lane that fronts our studio in an urban village in Delhi. From there, it will go to a warehouse, then on to a truck and, crossing customs, loaded onto an airplane, or taken to a port and loaded onto a ship. This happens along with the filling in and attestation of many documents. This done, the crate flies or sails the high seas in a container, passing through zones of unrest and protest, war and refuge, fraying and friendship, construction and devastation. After a few days, or some weeks, it disembarks. More forms are filled. More vans, trucks, unloading docks. More paperwork. Finally, it arrives at its destination. A museum, occasionally with shadows of history and the odd ghost lurking in its basement, waits to receive how we make sense of the world.

Looking at numbers to get a sense, a realistic idea, of the proportion and place that “art” occupies in relation to the productive capacity of the world economy, we find that the global art market—which includes modern art, contemporary art, and antiquities—was worth as little as US\$64 billion in 2019, or 0.075% of the GWP. (Twitter, a single social media company, was recently auditioned for US\$44 billion.¹⁰) The galleries and dealers of just five countries dominate this market. The United States corners 47% of the trade, China—24%, United Kingdom—13%, France—6%, and South Korea—2%. The 191 other countries remain, together, with 8%. India’s share of the global art market is about US\$200 million, that is, approximately 0.33%. (For global art market sales figures, see Sholette 2017.)

Auctions make up a significant proportion of sales in the global art market. According to a survey of the Indian visual arts “industry” and the art market in India:

In the period of January to September, 2017, 183 works of Indian contemporary art were sold in auctions around the world fetching a total of INR 126.3 million (\$1 million, 683 thousand, and 749 USD). This was a sharp decline from the 333 artworks sold for INR 399 million (5 million, 178 thousand and 112 US Dollars) during the same period in 2013 (KPMG and FICCI 2018).

How many artists are actually mobilized in this process? According to the Art Basel and UBS report on the state of the global art market in 2017:

Close to half of the value of sales on the (global) auction market came from just 1% of the artists whose work sold in 2016. Only 15% of artists had works priced in excess of \$50,000, and a tiny fraction (just over 1%) had works that sold for more than \$1 million (Art Basel and UBS 2017, 16).

Private transactions in art form part of the sector named “treasure” in the global financial argot. Banks maintain lists of what are called “high net-worth individuals” (HNIs) who are capable of, and have the inclination for, spending their wealth on rare fine art commodities (mainly paintings and sculpture, very rarely works in other media). Globally, HNIs tend to spend just 8% of their personal wealth on fine arts. Most of this is devoted to modern painting, some to classical art and antiquities, and a small fraction to contemporary art. The largest number of HNIs who buy art are, in descending order, from the United States, China, United Kingdom, France, and South Korea. Indian HNIs (whose numbers are not small) spend only 0.02% of their wealth on art (see Sutton 2017; also see McAndrew c.2017, c.2020).

The share of work of artists from India in this global market is very small. And, within it, the share of contemporary art from India in the global value chain of contemporary art sales (through production, commission, collection, purchases, and auctions—which, by themselves, are a good indicator of the robustness of a sector in the market) does not exist even as a countable percentage. A very small fraction of a very small sector in a very large country makes up the reality of contemporary art in India. Economically speaking, contemporary art, globally, or in national market terms, is of almost no significance in the global financial matrix. Given such insignificance, it is worth asking why art students are attacked again and again on what they make (Misra 2022).

This brings us to a further question: If contemporary art is such a small fraction of the value that gets produced in the world, then why is there so much anxiety around it? To address this question, we need to look at another real-world antagonism.

In India, voluntary organizations or research institutions or universities active in the fields of education, health, human rights, long time-scale research, medicine, religion, ecology, or self-help have to submit details of their structure and their managerial personnel, financial audits, and proposed activities to get a clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs so as to access any funding support that may come from institutions based in another country. This is to comply with a 2010 amendment to the 1975 Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA). This law, so suspicious of association, is, like the “people’s car,” a legacy of the internal Emergency of the mid-1970s. All subsequent regimes thought it fit and necessary to keep it, and to keep toughening it. The higher the clamor for a global investment climate favorable to India, the harsher the suspicion of volatility of not-for-profit associations that access funds across borders. No not-for-profit organization can access funding from any other source outside the border of India without a clearance, and monitoring, of intelligence agencies. In this way, denial of an FCRA clearance acts as a lever of control and can mean the difference between expansion and shrinkage of a cultural organization or arts initiative.

The extent of the paranoia becomes clear when we scrutinize the amount of money that actually flows through FCRA-cleared channels into India. In a US\$2.5 trillion economy, and with a federal state budget of US\$500 billion, the average annual inflow of money under FCRA in the years 2016–2019 was a meager US\$200 million. In terms of percentage, that is about 0.004% of the total state budget. That is 0.004% resource, policed and rigorously audited, experienced as a mortal threat, projected as a moral threat to the life of the nation (see Mint 2020).

What does this signify? There is a cultural-discursive assemblage—also talked of as a mood, or a climate, or a sentiment—that expresses dispositions circulating within society and about that society. It is an extremely fragile imbalance, and its fluctuations introduce political risk in the minds of the ruling arrangements and alignments—whether of caste, gender, generation, race, sexuality, abilities, or class. The deep distrust of “external associative influences” and their capacity to offset “inside” narratives of the nation is shared by those of political persuasions of all hues, from the gentlest liberal to the most delirious avenger.

A similar suspicion attaches to contemporary art. The ease with which it circulates and communicates across borders, with the “external” world, produces suspicion and envy. It is considered suspect and is sidelined, ignored, and interrogated because it retains the possibility of saying something surprising, something that marks a disruptive and disobedient flow that can emerge from somewhere outside manageable and predictable frameworks.

There are two ways, then, to defang the tenuous presence of contemporary art. The first move is to endow an exaggerated and disproportionate importance to the “value equations” performed by the “benchmarking” of auction prices as indicators of worth in the actually insignificant market environment within which contemporary art circulates. This is the “meritocratic form” (a tenet widely espoused) that makes a small number of people the soothsayers of capital, and of art. Its success stands in as a kind of motivational therapy for the material dysfunction and granular experience of risk in everyday life.

The second is a move undertaken by well-intentioned activists and socially alert critics to eviscerate contemporary art by suggesting that, despite its economic insignificance, it is somehow a bulwark to, and complicit in, the operations of capital and its phantasmagoric hold over an enthralled population. The tacit understanding by which art is produced, relayed, and written about can sometimes miss the simple fact that 97% of artists lead difficult lives yet find engaging ways to continuously de-frame the world and engender new milieus and capacities for re-apprehending the world.

The legal and constitutional theorist Gautam Bhatia has argued that the Indian Supreme Court's recent deep suspicion of anything in the realm of ideas and forms of life that emanates from outside the nation state (as expressed in a judgment on a minor detail of the FCRA), is a foundational attack on the right to form associations. He argues that the right to "associate" (to undertake the formation of social ties) is meaningless if it is constrained within the limitations of nation state forms (Bhatia 2022). Indeed, if artists, or musicians, or computer programmers, or workers, or mathematicians, or doctors or sportspersons are not able to "associate" and create networks of conversation, research, mutual aid, and exchange of experimental results and affinities with their peers in the world in sustained and egalitarian ways, these worlds will be eviscerated. The right to the arbitrary drawing of lines to define from whom or from where support can be sourced for the making and functioning of such "associations" is exercised exclusively by the state. This system prompts cultural and intellectual practices to encrust within fixed and known exchanges. We would argue that, in fact, the attitude most pronounced around the arts is the phenomenon of the *fear of associative tendencies*. The fear exists because the tendency to associate is seen as contaminating, as disruptive of the country's endogamous rules of the game of cultural coherence (see Santhosh 2020).

An Associative Glimmer in Intermittent Margins

New life forms emerge in the undergrowth of informal exchange. Here, now, is the last international, a Babel reborn in Babylon (Raqs Media Collective 2010).

In a recent interview, Cuban artist Tania Bruguera contends:

[being an artist is] not a specialized practice. The artist is somebody who can bring together people from other spheres to work in a vision of a different reality. The artist is the one who has to push the others to get away from their disciplinary boundaries (Sollins 2014).

Unconventional thoughts and ideas find ways into social consciousness, often from within milieus considered marginal. This outsider status of sources for ideas and sensations seems uncomfortable to societies and cultures wherein—despite massive concentration and centralization of executive and legal control—those in power feel insecure about its hold. The variegations of capital flows and fluctuations in productivity—expressed solely through the category of the "national" as a unit of understanding—lead to increasing fears of insolvency, and there are mounting debts needed to sustain the apparatus; a weakening grip on assets makes power shaky and, many a time, makes it appear illegitimate.¹¹ Dislocation, discontent, and disruption are normalcy. The constructed edifice of consensus is progressively besieged by a filigree of cracks and fissures. Amidst this dynamic, non-specialized practices work to create visions of a different reality, inviting others to delve in by forming seductive associative engagements. No wonder they become a site of anxiety and discomfort.¹²

Art practices hold the capacity to act associatively, invite exacting scenarios, build spirited milieus that innovate on protocols and thresholds, unleash out-of-habit, not-yet-tested forms of presence and utterance. All these help to underline why an economically marginal

practice generates so much unease and scrutiny. *Associative glimmer* depends on the activation of an imaginary, an ethic, and a practice of life that occurs within intermittent, temporal, margins. These margins are not geographical because there is no geography external to capital anymore. There is no part of the world left that is outside the domain of capital. The margins are not formally political either. That is, they are not locatable within the most self-conscious of capitalism's current political critics because, often, even their antagonism stays locked in within the logic of productivity and progress that capitalism demands, or alternatively they simply reproduce a culture of lack and lamentation.¹³

Not so long ago, the technological practices of free and open-source software coding and the early HTML-based Internet emerged from within associative networks of producers and researchers, often acting in free-time, outside the hours of mandated labor and across national and regional borders, giving a flickering and tantalizing glimpse of what the world of things and ideas could be if production moved away from wage labor toward a multi-site self-organization of material life and time. This happened at the heart of a grand restructuring of capital in the 1990s.¹⁴ Not entirely subsumed under capital, such practices, more and more, arrive and detour many a hard barrier of encryption and paywall to knowledge, governmental information, and surveillance apparatus.¹⁵

An artist friend of ours once quipped that most of artistic life cannot ever enter the world of “artfacts:com”!¹⁶ Within a lifeworld that is open to transcontinental traffic, alert to many dialects, and nourished by an interlacing of thinking, praising, critiquing, riffing, jamming over meals and coffee, hanging out, having accidental arguments, preparing assemblies, and being part of collective digressions and serendipities, art happens. This vivid world can stay hidden in plain sight.

This is the reasoning that we argued in *Five Million Incidents* (2019–2020), where we proposed that an assembly of forms of working and gathering with a hundred artists be based on an evocation of the infectious idea of *incident*:

Think of an incident as a fold in time—the extension of a fungal tendril, a quickened heart-beat, an epiphany, a flash of insight, an outbreak of goose-bumps, a moment of excitement, an occurrence, an encounter, a sighting, a memory. An incident can be anything that transforms the way we live or think, a conversation that carries a surge in its wake, an event that makes us rethink everything. Millions of incidents can populate a duration, making it come alive as an embodiment of temporal plenitude. That plenitude is a ground for making things anew (Raqs Media Collective 2020).

In a recent online symposium, *Staging the Contemporary: The Next Generation*, organized by the India Art Fair (2022) in collaboration with Ishara Art Foundation and Shiv Nadar University, almost twenty artists, all under the age of thirty-five, shared their works and practices under the generic rubric of “future generation.” The range of practices they presented was varied, including a forensic analysis of war sounds, writing poetry, putting the body in jeopardy in performance art, publishing artist books and making collaborative zines, working with an expanded collective group in the agrarian habitat, detailing the violence of the state in occupied territories, making personal archives. None of the artists spoke about the market or about being evaluated by the values of the market. There was an absence in their language of any terms indicating interest in valuation in terms of dominant protocols. Each protagonist, with their distinct experience of generating associative fields that move among many cities, regions, and continents, spoke of searching and making new durational relationships that would in fact be at odds with many other claims to community and identity.¹⁷

The idea that everyone, regardless of birth, class, caste, or sex, has a right to an education was a notion that emerged from within the milieu of the “Artists Federation of the Paris Commune,” a group of forty-seven artists and artisans in Paris who, in 1871, proposed, and

tried to practice, what they called a life of “communal luxury” and “future splendor” in the present (Ross 2015, 1, 4–5, 39, 45, 50, 58–61, 63–5, 70, 128, 137, 142; also see Reclus 2011, 81, 82, for a clear articulation of this idea). It was from within this milieu that Eugene Poitier, a fabric designer and textile artist (better known as the author of the lyrics of the *Internationale*) developed a proposal for “integral education” that would do away with what he considered to be the false hierarchy between “theoretical and practical knowledge” and “theory and practice” in general, to form a modus of discursive life that can be open and accessible to all. Poitier was in turn influenced by Joseph Jacotot, whom the philosopher Jacques Rancière brings to consideration in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* as the pioneer of a radical, egalitarian experiment in education that challenges cognitive hierarchies. Jacotot showed how everyone, erudite and analphabetic alike, can learn together through their equality of intelligences (Rancière 1991).

In Delhi not far from the campus of our alma mater Jamia Millia Islamia University, in the adjacent neighborhood of Shaheen Bagh, over a few months from December 2019 to February 2020, there was a highway blockade sit-in against the proposed Citizenship Amendment Act. The roads and walls next to the protest site, as well all over the university campus and its library, became a giant canvas. Drawings, paintings, sculpture, installations appeared and disappeared, as did an armada of paper boats with poems. Almost daily the authorities would remove or whitewash them; they would melt away, but would be redrawn and remade, again and again. Posters recited poetry and poetry was emboldened by posters. Anarchic murals were begun and grew. A fabric work of women as falcons appeared overnight.¹⁸ Poems were composed that burned their way into viral videos. Ad hoc libraries emerged with shared reading seats. People took selfies of themselves next to photographs depicting pitched battles with the police on campus. The bridge over the highway turned into a makeshift arcade for anonymous artists and poets, where slogans, jokes, puns, and messages of love and longing found company (Sengupta 2020).

This sensibility of togetherness as a means to unlearn and re-apprehend the world forms a latent, subterranean current that periodically emerges and shapes the world. It puts in motion an associative capacity that appears, like a luminous outline of a getaway car. This is the route, and the threat, that art sometimes marks on the map of this world.

Notes

- 1 *The Capital of Accumulation* narrates an oblique narrative of the relationship between metropolises and the world in homage but also as a counterpoint to Rosa Luxemburg’s (1913) exceptional critique of global political economy, *The Accumulation of Capital*. It is a video diptych that trawls through haunting, dreamlike landscapes straddling Warsaw, Berlin, and Bombay/Mumbai to produce a riff on cities, capitalism, and the twentieth century’s turbulent history: it is part natural history, part detective journal, part forensic analysis, part cosmopolitan urban investigation, and part philosophical dialogue. The video is available at: <https://works.raqsmediacollective.net/index.php/2010/01/18/the-capital-of-accumulation/> Password: 2010_cofa.
- 2 *Strikes at Time*, two channel video, blue room, flooring, 20 minutes, 2011. *Strikes at Time* weaves together found text from a worker’s diary, transformed by a collective rewriting by a group of young proletarian writers with video annotations on *The Nights of Labor* (1981) by Jacques Rancière. The work is a short essay on history of capital, the refusal of time, twilight ferment, and mythic tremors. The video is available at: <https://works.raqsmediacollective.net/index.php/2011/04/05/strikes-at-time-2/> Password: aboutit_strikes.
- 3 Some 11 billion tons of goods are transported by more than 50,000 merchant ships each year. In 2019 they covered nearly 60 trillion ton-miles (a ton-mile refers to transporting one ton of goods over a nautical mile). This represents 1.5 tons per person based on the current global population. As of 2019, the total value of the annual world shipping trade had reached more than US\$14 trillion. See United Nations (2019); and John (2019).

4 The internal Emergency declared by the Indira Gandhi government in India lasted for roughly one year and nine months, from June 25, 1975 till March 21, 1977. Ostensibly, the reason given by the regime for the proclamation of emergency was a surge of subversive political actions. Immediately, it had been preceded by a serious legal challenge to Mrs. Gandhi, the then Indian prime minister, whose election due to supposed electoral malpractices, which is usually given as an explanation for what instigated her to declare the emergency. Effectively, her government initiated a severe crackdown and repression of the rising climate of political dissent during this period. Fundamental rights were suspended, and 110,806 people, mainly political dissidents and opposition activists, were arrested under extraordinary laws during this period; see Shah Commission Of Inquiry (appointed by the government of India under Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 to look into the Excesses of the Internal Emergency, 1975–77), 3rd and Final Report (August 6, 1978), 134; Appointed by the Government of India under Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 to look into the Excesses of the Internal Emergency (1975–77); the report is online at <https://archive.org/details/ShahCommissionOfInquiry3rdFinalReport>.

The period also saw a program of punitive house demolitions and coercive sterilization drives (around 6.2 million people were sterilized in 1975) under the cover of a state-led “family planning programme.” This period, one of the darkest in modern Indian history, also led to the rise to power of Mrs. Gandhi’s younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, whose dream was the “Maruti” car. Sanjay Gandhi died in a plane crash while piloting his own aircraft in 1980, and he is remembered up to this day for his enthusiastic association with some of the worst excesses of the emergency—especially the punitive demolitions and sterilization campaigns. For more on the Emergency, see Jaffreot and Pratinav (2021). For more on the Sterilization program during the emergency, see Hvistendahl (2012). For more on Sanjay Gandhi and the Maruti car, see Tripathi (2015). For a company history of Maruti Suzuki, see *Business Standard* (n.d.).

5 This was definitely true for the “middle class” everyman. Stevens (1983) is a fascinating report that, quoting social scientists at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, indexes the rise of consumer expenditure amongst “middle class Indians” through the 1970s and early 1980s. Here is what it says: “Between 1970 and 1980, annual sales of scooters, motorcycles and mopeds nearly quadrupled, to more than 400,000. Sales of cars and jeeps nearly doubled, to 60,000 annually, from 1975 to 1981. Television sets have tripled, to more than 2 million, since 1977... And in a new buying craze, Indians are purchasing 20,000 video cassette recorders a month. Hundreds of video libraries have sprung up in the big cities. Self-Made Entrepreneurs Between 1978 and last year, production of cookies, a luxury food, increased nearly 50 %; wrist-watches, 20 %, to 5.3 million, and toothpaste 23 %. Soft drink sales doubled to 1.7 billion bottles. Cosmetics and beauty aids have become a \$100-million-a-year business.”

6 The appellation “left” or “mainstream left” in Indian politics is given to a coalition of social democratic parties, some of whom name themselves as “Communist Parties.” The economic policies of these parties, which span the spectrum from a state-capitalist “populist welfarism” to a “neoliberal” commitment to new capital, is leavened by a political nostalgia for the former Soviet Union, and often, unreconstructed Stalinism. These parties were politically significant from the 1970s through the early 2000s. For different periods, they governed three provinces (Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura). In West Bengal, which is where the Nandigram TATA car factory was to be located, they were elected to power consistently across thirty-five years.

7 The “Commando” unit was of 200 commandoes of the Rapid Action Force—a special paramilitary arm of the Central Reserve Police Force under the central ministry of home affairs. See Dutta (2012).

8 Even a decade after the dispute, the issues of unsympathetic media coverage of the workers point of view, which exacerbated the conflict, continue to remain unaddressed; see Ullah (2022).

9 This refers to Maqbool Fida Hussain (1915–2011), one of the most prominent modernist painters of post-independent India. He was persistently harassed, especially through court cases, by Hindu extremists for many years, and ultimately left India and took the citizenship of Qatar in 2010, months before he died in 2011.

- 10 The choice of the word “auditioned” is deliberate as we seek to give a sense of the intricate dance of “sizing each other up” that is still going on, at the time of writing, among Elon Musk, Twitter’s managing board, and the company’s shareholders. It’s as if all parties involved are assessing each other’s claims, and their abilities to perform faithfully to live up to the claims that they are making. Musk keeps moving the goalposts of what he wants Twitter to do to be “deserving” of his takeover bid. And the company, its board, and shareholders, seem to be ambivalent on some days, and enthusiastic on others. The situation, as of now, is interestingly unclear. Performances (and auditions) continue. See Associated Press (2022).
- 11 Over the last three decades many state apparatuses went insolvent and crashed, then were resuscitated by global sales of assets and by dispossessing the population of its savings. The recent case unfolding rapidly is Sri Lanka; see *Al Jazeera* (2022).
- 12 As social and economic distress steadily magnifies, populist regimes across the world (egged on by the social forces they represent) tend to fall back on the strategy of increasing cultural insularity and a cult of the “local” as the true hallmark of authenticity. We can see this happening everywhere, in the United Kingdom and the United States, and in parts of Western Europe, as much as in India. The shadow of this phenomenon is discernible in the changing rhetorics and priorities of cultural institutions across the world. In this milieu, suspicion against contemporary art and culture—as the bearer of cosmopolitan “contamination” and idioms of vernacular translocality—increases. Sometimes this suspicion is even voiced from within contemporary art, as if against itself, in a bid to return to, and restore, some fictive “authenticity.”
- 13 This follows the necessity of “state capitalist” antagonists of capitalism, which tend to fall back on models of cultural autarky and the suspicion of anything marked “alien,” as well as critics of capitalism who work with pre-capitalist and often imagined “pre-modern” currents—seized more by an imagined nostalgia for “what might never have been,” than by a criticism of what is, of what exists.
- 14 The Internet ramped up the globalization of capital by making real-time synchronization of productive processes possible across the globe and across time zones. This was most visible in the phenomenon of “call centers” and back-office outsourcing, but also applies to the streamlining of demand and supply chains, inventory management, and even in the “just in time” management of the production of components in complex manufacturing processes. Just as an example, it became possible to coordinate the dispersed production of different parts of a single automobile in vastly different locations, and to have them brought together through discrete supply chains to assemble a single car, as and when “demand” required. The globalization of capital had effectively given rise to the globalization of production processes. The increasing contact between labor in different parts of the world (of which labor in the software industry is an example) was, and remains, an inevitable corollary of this process.
- 15 A critical, ongoing case in the Delhi High Court on the stranglehold of intellectual property regimes over the circulation of research. See Internet Freedom Foundation (c. 2021); Kumari and Chaturvedi (c. 2020); Thapliyal (2022). See a sustained critique of information secrecy and blockades by various actors at *WikiLeaks*, online at: <https://www.wikileaks.org>. On the cruelty and mishap that the open culture encounters and lives with, see the case of Aaron Swartz, a summation of which is available at “Aaron Swartz,” *Wikipedia*, online at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron_Swartz. All accessed June 6, 2022.
- 16 Artfacts is an online artist ranking website that claims to assess the market worth of artists based on what it considers to be objective criteria, i.e. exhibitions and records of sales.
- 17 The online event organized by India Art Fair with artists presentation and discussions can be accessed in multiple videos available online at: <https://www.ishara.org/program-events/staging-the-contemporary-the-next-generation/>.
- 18 The idea of “women as falcons” riffs off the name of the neighborhood—Shaheen Bagh—which translates as “Garden of Falcons.” The image of the falcon’s flight as symbolic of the urge for liberty is commonly understood amongst Urdu speakers in India and Pakistan. It comes, especially, from a line in a poem by the celebrated twentieth century Urdu poet

Muhammad Iqbal—“tu shaheen hai, kam hai parwaaz tera” (“you are a falcon, your task is to fly”). The neighborhood of Shaheen Bagh in Delhi was self-consciously named after this line in the Iqbal poem. And hence, the women of Shaheen Bagh were seen, and came to see themselves, as “falcons.” On the naming of Shaheen Bagh, see Roychowdhury (2021), 171–172.

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ENVIRONMENT

Envisioning a More Just Future: Feminist Activist Art, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene

Lisa E. Bloom

We are living through an unprecedented acceleration of crisis-like climate events that have transformed our priorities in our scholarship and teaching as well as the kind of contemporary art we present in the classroom.¹ Focusing on the role of feminist artists-activists and their collaborators, the chapter explores activist art and film from outside the gallery/museum circuit of exhibition that takes advantage of animation technologies to engage the reality and severity of the climate crisis. The chapter concentrates particularly on how artists, through their focus on collaboration and activism, create different conceptions of possible futures, treating the climate crisis as an immediate emergency so future humans can survive and share an interdependent biosphere.²

Writing from an intersectional feminist perspective, the chapter insists on linking gendered, sexual, and racial discriminatory violence to wider environmental destruction. This approach brings together areas too often kept separate to question and complicate entrenchments that limit our imagination as mobilization to address the ways that socially and environmentally destructive practices intersect and interact. Absent an intersectional feminist perspective and an environmental justice framework, addressing the monumental changes wrought in our environment and perception will remain beyond our grasp.

The artists I discuss—Mollie Crabapple and the Wit and Wisdom art media collective—put more emphasis on the message-delivering aspects of the medium than on the formal concerns of object-based art. Seeking alternative networks for getting their work out during the pandemic, when most museums, art galleries, art schools, and universities were shuttered, their work is important to rethink what it means to be part of an arts community in the midst of a pandemic. Through the pandemic more collaborative and participatory forms of art and film emerged virtually, an expression of hope that changes spawned by these two crises will lead to the radical changes needed to avert catastrophe. Art and film on the climate crisis showed up in online news sites and journals as well as in activist programming for the climate movement, among other online venues.

Before introducing the artists' work, I will begin by discussing how we think of nature, landscape, and the environment in the era of the Anthropocene—or the Capitalocene or Chtulucene, as some might prefer—within which we now find ourselves. These terms refer to the current geological period identified by its unprecedented human environmental impact on a global scale and its consequences in the present moment. Following a discussion of terminology, I will examine recent animated paintings by artist Mollie Crabtree (et al.) in two short films: *Message from the Future with Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez* (2019; hereafter, *Message from The Future I*) and *Message from the Future II: The Years of Repair* (2020; hereafter, *Message from The Future II*). Both construct a vision of the future with an informed consideration of the failures of politicians, governments, scientists, and corporations to respond to anthropogenic climate change. Such short, animated films inspire us to interrogate the futures we are creating and make us imagine other nonhierarchical ways we can reorganize ourselves to construct a more just world. *Message from the Future I* and *II* are followed by a discussion of the 2021 online video art poem by Wit and Wisdom in collaboration with the Global Climate and Health Alliance, titled *Our Handwriting Might Be Bad, But Our Message is Clear*. It focuses on how societies can come together around a shared understanding of the health aspects of the climate crisis. In alerting us that we need to act quickly, the video poem shows us what we think of as the future as already happening in the present tense. Both the artists, filmmakers, and writers who contributed to these films view health concerns as intertwined with and exacerbated by the climate crisis. Finally, the contribution of art is central to enabling us to imagine a vision of the future that offers the potential of shared aesthetic experiences and solidarities, care, and empathy as part of technological world-building.

It is worth noting that none of the short online films discussed suggest that a dystopian future is inevitable. Rather, each reflects on the seriousness of what lies ahead. Naomi Klein and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez write about the present in the past tense, which makes their account all the more disturbing. *Message From the Future I* and *II* reveal how the feminist utopian imagination could help us take action in the present. In what follows, I present the potentiality of climate art and film as critical interventions to these ongoing problems.

Politics of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Chtulucene

Anthropocene refers to our current geological period, characterized by ecosystem failures, rising sea levels, and climate-led migrations, explored in this chapter in the context of the humanities and arts rather than the natural sciences and social sciences (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). First developed by the late Eugene Stoermer, a pioneer in the field of freshwater ecology, and refined by Nobel laureate and chemist Paul Crutzen, the concept was introduced in 2000 to name Earth's new geological epoch, identified by its unprecedented human impact on the global environment, and dated from the beginning of the industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century. Their evidence of how humans impacted planetary transformations of the Earth's most basic structures included its atmosphere, the melting of the polar ice caps, and the rising of the oceans.

Though experts tend to agree that the term Anthropocene denotes the period in which the surface of the Earth has been indelibly changed by humans, and that the rate of change is speeding up at alarming rates, there is also wide disagreement on when it began, and whether it should be named the Age of "Man," among other issues (Todd 2015; Zylinska 2017). Arts and humanities scholars who specialize in tracing differences between moments of time, communities, cultures, and aesthetic forms are critical of the term because it makes the human species at large the agent of history, and in so doing lumps all humans together into the Anthropocene that unfolds over 10,000 years but only leads to enormous change in CO₂ in the past 200.

The term Anthropocene itself is seen as problematic because it fails to challenge the inequality and justice of universalized projects of seemingly homogenous humanity. Therefore, the term has been heavily critiqued for perpetuating such notions. For example, indigenous scholar Zoe Todd, in collaboration with Heather Davis, argues “that the Anthropocene is a continuation of dispossession and genocide coupled with a transformation of the environment and ... should be dated from the time of colonization to provide a basis for the possibility of decolonization within this framework” (Davis and Todd 2017). For indigenous scholar Kyle Powys Whyte:

climate injustice does not involve, simply an ‘age of the human’ dated to industrial development ... [it] emerges as an issue more recently that is part of a cyclical history of disruptive anthropogenic environmental change caused by settler and other colonial institutions that paved the way for extractive industries and deforestation (Whyte 2017, 19).

Feminist scholars such as Anna L. Tsing rebuke the progressivist narrative of men’s cognitive ascent, pointing out that “women and men from around the world have clamored to be included in the status once given to Man. Our riotous presence undermines the moral intentionality of Man’s Christian masculinity, which separated Man from Nature” (Tsing 2015, vii).

In the context of this chapter on art and climate change activism, I have found aspects of the concept Anthropocene useful for the way it situates humans as part of nature, and not separate from it, and for the way it looks beyond conventional art and humanities frameworks to reframe our understanding of human agency toward the whole planet. In doing so, the concept challenges conventional understandings of contemporary art by complicating the term nature and the simple notion of a clear nature–culture divide, since it is no longer possible to separate nature from culture, or human from environmental systems, in the era of the Anthropocene.³ Nature is discussed as a category that is expanded to include both humans and nonhumans as targets for exploitation and extractive energy; conversely, nature is also likened to a sentient living assemblage that recognizes the interdependency of the human and the nonhuman.

Various alternatives to Anthropocene are also useful in thinking specifically about territorial corporate expansion and its ongoing competition over natural resources. Andreas Malm’s concept of the Capitalocene, developed further by Jason Moore and Donna Haraway, is a critical supplement to the term Anthropocene (see Malm 2016; Moore 2015; Haraway 2016). Moore’s notion of “cheap nature” derives from economics and envisions nature as both produced by and underlying the drive to despoil the earth for endless profit (Moore 2016).⁴

While the Capitalocene shifts the Anthropocene’s focus on human activities as the drivers of Earth’s natural systems to a political economy of capitalist structures, Donna Haraway extends both terms to address the nonhuman, reframing the crisis as the Chthulucene. For Haraway, the Chthulucene is an era (whose time and history are yet to be determined) in which the human race will confront its arrogance and humbly make kin with the biological beings coming from the underground (Haraway 2016; also see Rose, Gibson, and Fincher 2015). The terms Capitalocene and Chthulucene are significant to the feminist intersectional approach that I take to confront a crisis that transcends the merely environmental, and thus widens our purview to think of the entangled ecological dimensions as drawing on traditional indigenous knowledges and on more experimental speculative approaches (including science fiction) to bring into being an inclusive cultural engagement with a changing multispecies world and realms beyond the human (Haraway 2015).

Seeing from the Future: Mollie Crabapple and Collaborators

The feminist activist artists and their collaborators I discuss use humor, performance, and poetry to renew a notion of art that is not about making money but rather enables us to imagine a future that escapes the grip of neoliberal capitalism and the despair that stems from the crisis

of climate destruction. Each adapts painting and drawing methods of the handmade to create a popular form of dissent, drawing on a longer history of nineteenth-century political caricature and cartooning (Honoré Daumier 1808–1879), illustrating (Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec 1864–1901), and landscape painting (Jean-Francois Millet 1814–1875).⁵ Their work also recalls the collaborative spirit of mural paintings from the 1930s for the Works Progress Association funded by the New Deal and graffiti writing. These artists additionally share a common attitude toward process, action, and the building of images spatially and temporally that brings their work closer to other contemporary political artists who use animation in their work as a device for activism including Qiu Anxiong, Sadie Benning, William Kentridge, and Serge Onen.⁶

New networks linking issues routinely kept apart in climate change discourse are also emerging through and beyond the museum sector. A case in point is the work of artist Mollie Crabapple who, in collaboration with producer and co-writers Naomi Klein and politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, filmmaker Avi Lewis, and directors Kim Boekbinder and Jim Batt, produced a seven-minute animated film *A Message from the Future I* in 2019 hosted by the *Intercept*, a progressive online news organization. Klein explains that the film is a “thought experiment ... set a couple of decades from now, [that] is a flat-out rejection of the idea that a dystopian future is a forgone conclusion” (Klein, Crabapple, Lewis, and Ocasio-Cortez 2019).⁷

Turning to science fiction, the short film proposes a vision of a livable future made possible by the Green New Deal. Ocasio-Cortez recounts how the climate crisis happened and the ways that people around the world ended up in a very dangerous place thanks to their politicians, governments, and corporations. It goes on to present the other side of the process of what would happen if we chose to radically change course and save both our habitat and ourselves and build a better society out of these years of overlapping crises. Over seven minutes, the film follows the story of a fictional girl, Ileana, from the outer boroughs of New York City who grows up during “The Decade of the New Deal” and speculates about how a just transition of jobs, universal healthcare, Medicare for all and a total overhaul of the country’s energy system might affect her life as well as others in her community.

In contrast to the massive programs brought into being by this new legislation, the sensuous illustrations of Mollie Crabapple communicates in a perpetual present tense the everyday changes this transformed future is made possible by the Green New Deal in Ocasio-Cortez’s neighborhood in Queens. By showing her own hands in the act of painting, Crabapple brings to life and makes familiar and intimate policy that would otherwise seem distant and abstract. Through her artwork (Figure 18.1) we can see the vibrancy of an



FIGURE 18.1 Molly Crabapple, “We Can Be Whatever We Have the Courage to See” (2019), still from a painting from the collaborative animated film by Boekbinder and Batt, *A Message from the Future with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez*, 2019. Boekbinder and Batt 2019 / with permission from Future with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

environment that is now restored to health, showing working class people both young and old who are typically seen as innocent victims of global warming without agency thriving in their neighborhoods. A banner reading “we can be whatever we have the courage to see” captures not just the work involved in building a better society but also its pleasures. In this watercolor, Crabapple shows the contentment of elderly residents playing bridge and performing music in a flourishing neighborhood garden. Another image under the banner, “You Can’t Be What You Can’t See” links artistic and political representation, as she depicts Ileana along with other young girls inspired to enter politics by seeing women of color elected to the US House of Representatives in 2018—those same representatives who crafted the Green New Deal.

Much of this film was conceived shortly after the multi-racial group of children and youth involved in the Bay Area’s activist Sunrise Movement’s Youth versus Apocalypse organization showed up at the San Francisco Office of Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein in early 2019 to urge her to vote for the Green New Deal (see Goodman 2019). Angered by Feinstein’s dismissive response to the young activists, Ocasio-Cortez, a woman of Puerto-Rican descent who decided to run for Congress after participating in the indigenous-led struggle at Standing Rock, started working on this film with young people in her community.⁸ Throughout the film Crabapple paints portraits of actual children from Ocasio-Cortez’s multi-racial district of Queens, New York and puts them in the film as active participants in her message from the future. A drawing by Crabapple is presented of Ileana in the near future standing in a newly restored landscape, holding a shovel, and wearing a hard hat in the foreground as she prepares to restore wetlands that appear in the background (see Dunaway 2021). These colorful animated paintings are not evidentiary documents with claims to transparent truth. Rather, they are acts of envisioning how the future could look for ordinary citizens that she draws in the present. The labor of producing paintings and drawings for the animation is made visible and palpable by the repeated actions of Crabapple’s hands at work, which over time gives form to the illusion of movement in the animation. This added dimension of the passage of time in the creation of each drawing and painting by the artist sweeps up the viewer temporally and redirects attention to the handwork of the artist as she draws each scene that shapes the narrative.

A Message from the Future I has been viewed more than twelve million times, was nominated for an Emmy award, and became a centerpiece for the Sunrise Movement’s 250-city *Road to a Green New Deal* tour in 2019. Aimed at a popular audience, it exploits the belief that the visual has the power to expose truth. Yet, the need to see it to believe it can also be a route to a politically effective messaging strategy enabling us to think about how to propose a redrawing of our future. Positivism and its overreliance on tangible proof may work best in reverse; that is, as an alternate future, or vision. It taps into a more direct approach to how vision works, counter-intuitively suggesting the unseen potential of the visual, especially for politics. The film shows a future world, one that resembles the familiar present, but now illustrating the collaboration of politics and art through an artistic vision that engages and even seduces the viewer to see the potential for a broad civic response to climate crisis.

After artist Mollie Crabapple created the animated paintings for *A Message from the Future I*, she started painting portraits of essential workers and projecting them on the sides of buildings in New York City during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Crabapple 2020). Her artistic work in 2020 was also the catalyst to create a second futurist film *Message from the Future II* (Klein and Crabapple 2020). The film’s narrative was shaped by the pandemic, a notion of what a human-to-human care response might look like, and what models might be invoked in the process. It is told from the perspectives of frontline organizers and activists about their experience with COVID-19, explaining to viewers that another world leading to a tangibly better life is possible and the seductive beauty of Crabapple’s animated paintings make us see and feel the many ways that life is worth fighting for.

This nine-minute online film features a high-profile cast of international narrators from around the world, including Emma Thompson, Gael Garcia Bernal, Black Lives Matter co-founder Opal Tometi, and the Nigerian poet and activist Nnimmo Bassey. Rather than discussing how the climate crisis happened as was narrated in the first film, the second film presents the other side of the process: how societies can come together across racial, ethnic, religious, and gender divides to heal the planet. This better world is visualized in “The Years of Repair,” an image of two workers, one black and one white, from the future whose backs are turned to the viewer but whose hands are linked as they walk with determination toward the future together in a thriving field of green foliage and bees (Figure 18.2). This is a different notion of nature as us, as inside us, and around us, rather than encasing reality in capitalist dualisms that separates nature from society. These kinds of images communicate to wider audiences by hijacking the global media, while at the same time creating affective solidarity by presenting the unity and heightened visual and sensual experience of shared purpose and solidarity in a world where humanity and society are no longer separated.

In the film, the pandemic acts as a magnifying lens that instructs humanity in a series of lessons both about exchange value and human labor as problems of late capitalism but also how the binary of nature/society is implicated in the violence, inequality, and oppression of the modern world. In the film we see specifically the way the pandemic compounded pre-existing crises organized around profit. The virus lays bare the depleted character of a society that cut the public health infrastructure and treats frontline workers as disposable emphasizing the compassionate work that frontline workers are doing to keep us alive in a segment featuring close-up images of the hands of workers. “The hands were all of us,” explains the narrator. “We are entangled. Keeping each other alive. One of the lessons of COVID-19 was that the virus showed us what is truly essential” (Klein and Crabapple 2020).

In the film, systemic racism and sexism is presented as an assault on the body. It depicts the risks of sending human beings to do the most dangerous of jobs in for-profit assisted living facilities, meatpacking plants, and “fulfillment centers,” and the cruelty of warehousing people in prisons and immigrant detention houses. In such sequences the film expanded the meaning of Black Lives Matter by showing us how Black and Brown women and queer health workers undertook frontline jobs in disproportionate numbers based on economic



FIGURE 18.2 Molly Crabapple, “Years of Repair” (2020), still from a painting from the collaborative animated film, *Message from the Future II: The Years of Repair*. Molly Crabapple.

class, and consequently were more vulnerable to infection and death. In *Message from the Future I*, Ocasio-Cortez is the star; in this second film, it is rank-and-file organizers and activists who rise up and topple the authoritarian rulers to create *Message from The Future II*. In both cases it is not one or two individual movements but a convergence of activists involved in labor and climate issues as well as the empowerment of feminist, queer, and indigenous peoples. In their collective work, the state that aligns itself with capitalism is not an ally but the target of their demands for universal healthcare, police reform, and a sweeping Green New Deal.

Message from The Future II includes lessons about the essential labor that makes life possible and enjoyable and yet has been so persistently discounted. In the new future imagined by the film, the environmental ethics of “care” is a basic function that sustains life and grants us our common humanity, rather than positioned within capitalism where labor power depends on competition not collaboration and is only for profit. Care is not intentionally aligned with conventional gender roles nor united in an emphasis on a woman–nature affinity. Rather, as a nod to Donna Haraway’s Chthulucene, the new “care” workers in the “years of repair” include even “winged pollinators and the leafy oxygen makers” from the more-than-human world. The creators’ notion of care is not only a female prerogative in the face of masculinist science but also an environmentalist response that points to the limits of capitalism and the way it has been seen as the only way of organizing nature. In the utopian future created by Crabapple, and her collaborators, actions include: funding public schools so that bloated budgets for prisons are no longer needed; building a digital commons to “vaccinate” society against disinformation; dismantling the oil, coal, and gas industries and using their profits to clean up the mess and prevent the climate from further destroying the planet; establishing a truth and reconciliation commission to address colonial violence and conquests of the past that had shaped our world; and returning previous stolen land to the indigenous who will collaborate with others on saving a degraded planet.

No Healthy Lives Without a Healthy Planet: Wit and Wisdom and the Global Climate and Health Alliance

A short animated-video poem created in 2021 by the independent television company Wit and Wisdom in collaboration with the Global Climate and Health Alliance speaks on behalf of forty-six million of the world’s healthcare workers.⁹ Titled, *Our Handwriting May Be Bad, But Our Message Is Clear* and also known by the hashtag #climateprescription, the video offers a more international perspective than the one presented in *Message from The Future II*. This short film featured on the progressive news and radio show *Democracy Now*, focuses specifically on how the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic helped make visible the global health aspects of climate change and pollution. Funded and launched by the Global Climate and Health Alliance, and subtitled in different languages, the film bridges transnational environmentalism and grassroots activism striving to develop forms of belonging for doctors in an era of globalization, COVID-19, and climate crisis.

This video is part of a larger protest campaign that included an open letter to heads of state around the world, as well as every nation’s lead climate negotiator, calling for urgent climate action to protect people’s health.¹⁰ More than 450 organizations together with over 3,400 individuals from 102 different countries have been involved in this effort. In recent years the Global Climate and Health Alliance has been involved in actions around the world including protests by its members, in conjunction with the activist group Doctors for Extinction Rebellion at COP26 in Glasgow at the time the video was released on November 21, 2021 to the presidencies of both COP26 in Glasgow and COP27 in Egypt, 2022.

The opening line of this video poem invokes solidarity among healthcare workers and doctors around the world, emphasizing what they have already collectively witnessed. As one

unidentified doctor says offscreen: “I have seen rising rates of heat exhaustion; depression; double the normal number of asthma exacerbations; heart disease, heart attacks, stroke; problems with kidneys, hearts, and lungs ... and the worsening of psychiatric illnesses.”¹¹ Many of the doctors and healthcare workers in the video speak about climate-related health impacts on their patients, and are angry about the negligent institutional responses to it. The statements are put in the first person but are emerging from processes and values of interconnectedness and interdependence to assert that elusive “we.” Dignifying and memorializing the DIY aesthetics to underscore their value and enduring relevance, we see a hand-drawn aesthetic using the many signatures to both draw the fury of a tsunami or the form of a lone figure attached to an IV drip contending with depression and a worsening health condition exacerbated by the harsh realities of climate breakdown (Figure 18.3). Wit and Wisdom stresses the dignity of these patients and evokes the style of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century figurative drawings that elevated the working classes in the work of artists Honoré Daumier, Francisco de Goya, and Käthe Kollwitz, among others. Yet their work employs erasure as a necessary and central transformational act, drawing from the melding of images associated with gestural handwork and the durational qualities of cinema.

Accompanied by expressive animated drawings that are always in movement in the animation, the doctors use simple statements of fact, and more specifically the emotional affectivity of their many voices and languages, to express the psychological distress and declining health of their patients. The drawings are constantly in motion but each new image retains a temporal trace of the previous image to add textural density to these images that connect our worsening health and safety to yet another extreme climate event. Producing drawings of rising sea levels and frequent heat waves brings these histories into the present. As one doctor says: “When the category 4 typhoon made its landfall, the hospital’s basement flooded. Heat waves close to 50 degrees (centigrade); the unprecedented droughts and locus infestations; more frequent, longer and hotter heat waves are making my patients sicker.”¹²

The forthright acknowledgment of the health problems already existing from climate change invites many different affective responses from the millions of viewers of the video poem. These are uncomfortable feelings often denied in neoliberal culture, but ones to which we must be attend. All this emotional direct address is matched by the dynamic imagery of the handwriting in constant motion like swirling currents, morphing unpredictably like global warming itself. Like climate change, the dynamic visuals unsettle the viewer and welcome them to protest the status quo.



FIGURE 18.3 Wit and Wisdom, “Heart Disease, Heart Attacks, Strokes,” 2021, still from a drawing from the collaborative animated film by Wit and Wisdom and the Global Climate and Health Alliance. Courtesy of Lisa Bloom.

The video's conclusion takes the form of a "climate prescription," which is a direct call to world leaders to accept action as a cure to the climate crisis. They conclude with the following collective statement as presented by Jeni Miller, director of the Global Climate and Health Alliance:

I prescribe healthy air as a right for all children. I prescribe the rich nations to make the biggest cuts in emissions; to fund climate-health adaptation projects; to invest in reversal of the negative impacts; to build resilience; and tackle health and social inequalities; and stop investing in fossil fuels. Climate change is a health emergency, and it is my ethical duty to speak about it. We have a crisis (Goodman 2021).

Creating Alternatives to Repair the World

One of the most important challenges facing artists, activists, and scholars is how to offer creative alternatives and suggest ways to remake and repair the world. In the online films discussed, the boundaries between art and activism dissolve to generate a genre appropriately called "climate art." With these animated works, the art amplifies actions as is the case with the #climateprescription and infuses them with wit, wisdom, and poetics that slows down the viewer to take in the message. Each piece becomes part of a global conversation through visual means making dissent accessible to its viewers. All three present a direct approach to how vision works, counter-intuitively suggesting the unseen potential of the visual and the importance of art to create substantive meaning and heightened emotionality of shared purpose for climate politics globally.

Though the reconceptualization of the Earth in the Anthropocene informs all three works, in the case of Wit and Wisdom, humans have to consider the planetary nature of climate risk to health and how they are coupled with both local and global environmental problems. The perspective of having an environmental world citizenship, what Ursula Heise (2008) calls an "eco-cosmopolitan" framework, supports the artist-activists and doctors claim to visibility in *Our Handwriting May Be Bad, But Our Message is Clear*. But the lack of specificity in #the climate prescription's video can also flatten the global "we." On the one hand, as a transnational protest piece, it intends to represent more than simply inundation or melting from climate change, but the invisibility of the deteriorating health of communities around the world. Inequalities, the distinction between rich and poor nations and national differences are evoked by the inclusion of different languages spoken by the doctors and health workers participating in the video. Drawing augmented by the voices of health workers becomes a way to materially insist upon the importance of more inclusive histories of those already suffering medical conditions from climate change around the world. At the same time, the global "we" of the video poem and the protest letter puts much needed international pressure on the presidencies of both COP26 in Glasgow and COP27 in Egypt in their hopes for making a better future in the face of a health crisis that is exacerbated by the worsening climate crisis. Targeting seasoned policy makers, the Wit and Wisdom video is extremely clever and sophisticated in its reference to traditional drawing methods that transforms the viewer to empathize with those patients at greater risk.

By contrast, the animated paintings by Mollie Crabapple are also meant for a wide audience, but in this case, it extends to young adults and children and the style is appropriately friendly and highly accessible to millions of young viewers. Her animated paintings use seductive beauty to create an immersive experience for the viewer and the progression of her works with the narration keeps the viewer engaged. All three films use art to create an environmentalist empathy to present new collective forms of being in the world. At the same time they also engage the severity of the Capitalocene and create new understandings of inequalities by also bringing attention

to extractive views and the political impact of the frameworks of oil and gas corporations. *Message from the Future I* in particular dwells on fossil fuel companies such as Exxon-Mobil that, in the past and present, enable governmental policy by seeking to hide or “greenwash” the evidence of their environmentally destructive behavior (for more on extractive views, see Gómez-Barris 2017). *Message from the Future II* explores the possibility of a politics beyond individual rights and liberties and toward the promotion of the well-being of others, including nature, with whom we are in relationship. In both *Message from the Future I* and *II*, witnessing becomes embodied, and Crabapple, Klein, et al. show that feminist, queer, Black, and indigenous perspectives are central to formulating livable futures. Both these works call attention to the work of activist artists who use strategies of science fiction while incorporating scientific fact to link climate change to its socioeconomic roots in fossil-fuel capitalism and colonialism. Both reframe the climate crisis, providing generative art that identifies hidden realities and sparks alternative futures in the hope of influencing the non-fictional planet.

All three films discussed reflect an investment in the politics of visibility through the optics of a figurative style that punctures the status quo of climate denial. They conjoin issues routinely kept apart in climate change, drawn from a diversity of vantage points, and united by the desire to reimagine a more just world. Each offers a collective and more forward-looking alternative or even a revolutionary vision by foregrounding the necessity of social change and foregrounding healthcare. But at the same time the specificity of their different aesthetics is part of their different political strategies to energize and mobilize particular audiences. In each case, the artists immersed in the climate activist scene as insider-chroniclers propel social change forward utilizing visual and sensual experiences as an energizing force to social movements. Such experimental and generative art plays a fundamental role in connecting and empowering the transnational climate movement. It also broadens our understanding of climate breakdown with its focus on planetary survival to create new knowledges and networks, which I hope will support old and recent forms of collaborative, participatory, and activist climate art.

Notes

- 1 Thanks to El Glasberg for her invaluable feedback on the first half of the article. and to Robin Clark, Sarah Thornton, and Milly Williamson—members of my writing group for 2021–2022 at the Beatrice Bain Center in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies, University of California, Berkeley—for their wonderful editing suggestions on this chapter. The work builds on research from Bloom (2022a). Also see my earlier article Bloom (2022b).
- 2 More attention is starting to be given to artistic responses to protest art in university art museums and galleries. See the groundbreaking exhibition curated by Betti-Sue Hertz, *The Protest and the Recuperation*, held at the Wallach Art Gallery at Columbia University in New York from June 12 to August 14, 2021: York. Available at: <https://wallach.columbia.edu/exhibitions/protest-and-recuperation>. Also see the related publication Hertz and Premnath (2022).
- 3 What I propose is similar to what Haraway calls *naturalcultural*; a term she uses to signal the false binary that separates these otherwise inseparable contact zones of origins and becoming. See Haraway (2007).
- 4 Joshua Clover’s provocative formulation of the Capitalocene is even more broadly descriptive of the role of economic systems: “ecological despoliation of humans is a consequence not of *humans* ... as the name Anthropocene suggests, but of Capital ... with its compulsion to produce at a lower cost than competitors for profit” (Clover 2021).
- 5 The artists in this chapter also participate in a rich art historical tradition that focuses on the environmental conditions in which we are collectively immersed dating from the beginning of the industrial revolution. This trend is visible in the efforts of John Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), John Constable (1776–1837), Theodore Rousseau (1812–1867), and Claude Monet (1840–1926), among others. For more on this trend, see Thomas (2000).

- 6 For more on animated painting as a form of contemporary art, see the related publication on the works of Qiu Anxiong, Sadie Benning, William Kentridge, and Serge Onen in the exhibition curated by Betti-Sue Hertz, Buchan, Hertz, and Manovich (2007).
- 7 For the follow-up short online film from 2020 that addresses COVID-19, see Klein and Crabapple (2020).
- 8 On Ocasio-Cortez's experience at Standing Rock, see Paiella (2018).
- 9 The two-minute long online poetic video by Wit and Wisdom in collaboration with the Global Climate and Health Alliance, *Our Handwriting May Be Bad, But Our Message is Clear*, is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AcFYIFb_H4, accessed on May 10, 2023.
- 10 For the transcript of the Global Climate and Health Alliance climate letter, "Healthy Climate Prescription," see Goodman (2021). A full list of the letter's signatories is available at: <https://healthyclimateletter.net>, accessed on May 18, 2023.
- 11 For an interview with Jeni Miller, director of the Global Climate and Health Alliance, and the transcription of the full video text, see Goodman (2021).
- 12 The entire video text as it appears transcribed in English is available at: https://www.democracynow.org/2021/11/12/climate_health_pollution_decarbonize_cop26, accessed on May 11, 2023.

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Identity/Subjectivity

INDIGENEITY

Global Futurisms: Prophetic Practices of Reclamation, Liberation, and Transcendence

Timotéo I. Montoya II

I stumbled upon Indigenous futurisms in 2016 during the shallow height of my career as an electronic music producer and DJ. At the time I had been touring small shows across the country and received an invitation to open for a group that was then called A Tribe Called Red (now named The Halluci Nation after a poem by John Trudell). The Halluci Nation is an all First Nations (Indigenous nations of Canada) electronic music group based out of Ottawa, Ontario that became famous for fusing powwow songs with electronic music such as dubstep, moombahton, and trap. Around this time their music started getting referenced alongside something called *Indigenous Futurism*, for their performances utilized technology and Indigenous themes in a mix of traditional and “modern.”¹ This term immediately piqued my interest and by 2019, while working with The Cultural Conservancy (an Indigenous nonprofit based out of California’s Bay Area), using various “modern” technologies to document “Traditional Ecological Knowledge,” I became enmeshed in this emerging field through the inquiry of using “modern” technology in an Indigenous, or decolonial, context (see Whyte 2013).²

Indigenous Futurism, a term coined by Grace L. Dillon in the 2014 anthology *Walking the Clouds*, is a movement in contemporary Indigenous art that liberates Indigenous identity from romanticized or stereotypical notions of indigeneity through creating decolonial perspectives on the future or other speculative realities, referred to as *futurisms*. According to Dillon there are six themes of Indigenous Futurism integral to the movement: Native Slipstream, Contact, Indigenous Science and Sustainability, Native Apocalypse, and what she calls Biskaabiiyang, or “Returning to Ourselves” in her native Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe Language). Through these themes, she argues, Indigenous Futurist artists unsettle Western colonial assertions and romanticizations of indigeneity that obscure and invisibilize the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, allowing a reclamation of Indigenous identities that are situated in the present (as opposed to being relegated to the past, as primitive or extinct) by creating speculative futures in which Indigenous peoples and their cultures exist, survive, thrive, and even *save the world* (Dillon 2012).³

Learning about and working with Indigenous futurisms provided something that I had sought for much of my life: a reconciliation between my traditional, tribal identity as a reconnected member of the Lipan Apache Band of Texas, and my identity as an urban, “modern,” and mixed Indigenous person who was at the time working as an information technology (IT) professional in one of the largest tech companies in the California Bay Area.⁴ Growing up as a computer nerd on Myspace, World of Warcraft, and reddit, and working in IT and media for close to ten years, my identity had long been split between the worlds of technology (including the Internet, electronic dance music, and video games), and the self that prayed before each meal, attended ceremony, and sang traditional songs. I had simply accepted that these two parts of my identity, oft reduced to my Indianness and my whiteness, would never assimilate; I experienced this situation as an inability to wholly claim either identity. In the Indigenous Futurist worlds I created and experienced I finally had a place where the interstitial complexity of my identity was reflected and interpreted as a source of generativity instead of confusion.

The more I worked with Indigenous Futurist theory and praxis, the more I felt the internal dissonance of my identity dissolve into the soils of fertile futures in which “modern” technology, the cultural and ecological crises of climate collapse, extractive industries, border politics, racism, genocide, violence due to perceived gender/sexuality, diaspora, the threats to the cosmologies and Traditional ecological knowledge of my peoples, and the complex globalized Internet culture of the twenty-first century could be approached and reconfigured as emergent future potentials where I may sow seeds of prophesy, embodying the cultural responsibility of survivance I feel toward my people and ancestors (see Vizenor 1999).⁵

Global Futurisms

My experience of working with Indigenous futurisms highlighted for me the import and potential of working with futurisms that exist both inside of and beyond Western colonial society. These new futurisms are rapidly expanding and, with names such as Amazofuturism, Chicanafuturism, and Hawaiian Futurism, I believe it vital to define this diverse emergent movement as *global futurisms*, acknowledging the inextricable connection these movements have to one another via globalization, the Internet, and an underlying philosophy of self-determination that enables them to be created from a place of individual and/or tribal/ethnic sovereignty.

Global futurisms, defined here as futurisms created by what Rosemary Campbell-Stephens calls the *peoples of the global majority* (Black, Indigenous, Brown, Asian, and dual-heritage peoples existing largely in the global south make up 80% of the global population), approach the future as a stage, in which identity, cosmology, technology, ecology, art, media, diverse regional histories, liberation, and most importantly, the lived complexities of the *present*, may be explored, extrapolated, and utilized as materials that *re/construct* the future via futurisms which decenter and explore *transcending* Western colonial society (see Campbell-Stephens 2020).⁶ I believe these global futurisms offer the world potential paths toward vitalizing and adaptable futures beyond the imagination of Western colonial society, and are better suited to contend with the ecological, cultural, and spiritual crises and challenges of the twenty-first century.

Given this definition global futurisms are inherently postmodern and postcolonial, for their existence and practice critique, deconstruct, internalize, externalize, and exist beyond Western colonial society, both defining it and transcending it. To better understand global futurisms and the potentials they hold to inform emergent global cultures, I will first explore how we can define the future as a stage upon which the present emerges. I will then survey three distinct futurisms—the Futurist art movement of Italy, Afrofuturism, and Indigenous futurisms—to determine how they inform, define, and reflect the cultural epochs of *modernism*, *postmodernism*, and what is becoming increasingly known as *metamodernism*.

An Invitation for Collective Intention

Now before I move on, I want to invite you, the reader, to hold an intention as you read this chapter. For some of us, working with futurisms is akin to a vital responsibility of embodying the prophecies and dreams of our ancestors. So, whether it is creating or critiquing comics, writing, painting, virtual and augmented realities, game design, architecture, performance, or any number of emergent media, we are opening doors beyond our present, and this is a matter that may manifest beyond our 12-point font and critical apathies to impact the lived realities of the seven generations, defined by the Indigenous theorist Vine Deloria as the three generations before and after you.⁷ I ask you to hold an intention of bearing your responsibility to the future, however infinitesimally small it may be, close to your heart. For the future is not built by “modern” ideals alone, nor does it simply emerge from the valiant rubble of a postmodern critique, it is *built* by the bodies, hearts, souls, and visions of people and their children. Handle the future with care. If there is anything we are lacking as a global community it is exactly what I believe working with and exploring global futurisms can bring us—*hope*.

The Future as Emergent Present

The future. That ever-ephemeral place. Close your eyes, think of it now. Take a snapshot in your mind, maybe scribble a few words, or trace a calligraphic skyline. Is it a shining utopia with hydrogen hover cars, high rising eco-designs that revel in the sun’s clear light? Is it fire and brimstone, detritus of forgotten technology set to a backing track of human and animal suffering? Have humans become obsolete? Have all manner of robots and AI machines taken over? Are the bodies you see Brown, Black, white, yellow, red, queer, cis? What does it smell like? What does your tongue taste? What do you hear? What does it feel like? Are you under surveillance? Are you and your communities *liberated*? Are you afraid, joyful, loved, or alone?

I promise this isn’t a Creative Writing 101 prompt; let me explain: this was a small attempt at inviting you into the mundane, yet mystical, act of prophesying the future. When we consider and imagine the future it provides an opportunity to unearth our destructive leanings, our naïve urgings, our nihilistic or idealistic tendencies, and uncover the limiting cultural narratives that science fiction and other popular media use to inform our conception of the future (dystopias, as scarily astute as some of them are, are getting a little passé, are they not?).

When the artist, cultural theorist, scientist, technocrat, or child prophesizes, the future becomes a stage upon which the present lived complexities of individual and collective realities, or what I call the *present frame*, are exposed, magnified, extrapolated, and speculated upon. This *future stage* is limited by our ability to comprehend the knowable present and our aptitude at speculating upon the unknowable future.

When we consider the future, as we did earlier, it becomes *an ever-unfolding stage of presence and emergence*, a stage upon which the oscillation between the known present and the unknown future continually emerges in the present. It is this *future stage* that all forms of futurist art, or *futurisms*, stretch their legs and play upon.

Futurisms as Memetic Potentials

Futurisms, in their most common form as science fiction, are continuously informing and prophesying our lived realities, whether via technological advancements like the virtual reality holodeck upon Star Trek’s USS Enterprise (1988), surveillance technologies as tempered by George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential dangers as seen in Isaac Asimov’s *I, Robot* (1950), modern philosophies like those

found in the “red pill, blue pill” decisions of The Wachowski Sisters’ *The Matrix* (1999), or the countless prophecies and creation stories of Indigenous people that guide their sovereign nations. The cultural material created by these stories, speculative realities, or what might be called futurisms, are dispersed readily through culture because their oscillation between the known present and unknown future create novel, and hopefully positive, ways of understanding the world that better capture the emerging complexity of our present cultures, ecologies, and societies.

Futurisms give us the potential language and materials needed to define and build the future through a memetic condensing of complex realities.⁸ These memes (easily replicable condensed complexities or concepts via language, art, and media) act as the diversity needed to adapt to novel eco-cultural stressors that we face as a global society, such as climate change, population growth, state violence, systemic racism, sexuality and gender violence, political upheaval, and diaspora. Much like an ecosystem, whose adaptability to novel environmental stressors is positively correlated to the diversity of its biology, so too is a vital, thriving, future limited by the diversity of cultural materials and potentials that inform its emergence.

Understanding the *present frames* that limit the *future stage* and its potentials is vital if we are to utilize global futurisms prophetic practices in a way that *shapes change* toward a pragmatic and hopeful future that is better tomorrow than what we are living today—toward what futurist Kevin Kelly calls *protopia* (as opposed to the sometimes naïvely idealistic utopia).⁹ Examining futurisms through the cultural epochs of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism allows us to elucidate the present frames these diverse futurisms define and emerge from, so we may utilize them with a purposeful intent, or *teleology*, of generativity, reciprocity, healing, and hope.

Modernist Futures of Authoritarian Progress

In 1909, Italy’s Futurist movement was defined via a manifesto published on the front page of Italy’s most popular newspaper at the time, *Le Figaro*, by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. In this manifesto, Marinetti defines a highly politicized philosophy of life rooted in a youthful devotion to and weaponizing of all things new, fast, dangerous, and dominating (see Humphreys 2006). To fulfill this philosophy, the Futurists determined that aggression was a necessary component to subjugate the traditional heritages and limited then-present political and art movements that they viewed as threatening or slowing the emergence of a new, modern, Italy, an Italy supposedly destined to take its place as an imperial power on par with the other European super powers, Britain, France, and Germany.

The art and philosophy of Futurism did not simmer at the edges of the classical or traditional mythos, but constructed new ones radically departed from previous forms, in reverence of its new gods: speed, aggression, desire, and innovation. In doing so Futurism challenged all forms of the *traditional* from art and architecture, to fashion, technology, and even language itself. It captured this departure in its art and sculpture by releasing the mimetic still frame of the traditional painter and sculptor and instead drawing attention to movement and speed through impressionistic blurring and abstract experiments that evoke in two or three dimensions linear time, energy, and light. It captured in its architecture and design an aesthetic that sought to celebrate and optimize the urban experience through new technologies, materials, and shapes. In this way Futurism was revolutionary in the larger modernist movement as it captured and amplified a vital component of modernity itself, *progress*, and it often did so with a novel energetic dynamism that was certain of its ability to manifest such potentials.

Futurism’s unique mixture of aggression, dominance, progress, and use of the manifesto caught the spirit of a fascist Italy, providing Benito Mussolini a novel politic and aesthetic

rooted in fascist ideals that sought to overthrow the old and replace it with a new nation. Marinetti became committed to the idea that authoritarianism was the correct vehicle for his idealist, progress-oriented manifesto, and it was these associations (rejected by much of the Western avant-garde art world) that ultimately lead to the waning of Futurism into obsolescence. Marinetti passed away, a year before the end of WWII, and a few months before the execution of Mussolini.

The shifts in global cultures in the post-WWII period saw the emergence of a critical attention to modernist ideals, with increasing skepticism or indifference toward these ideals due to the devastations European culture had wrought through the two world wars of the twentieth century. The modernist metanarratives of progress and of the immutable truth of Western science began to unravel and were replaced by a disillusionment toward Europe and its traditions—including, especially, Western colonialism (whose power and influence was heavily predicated on the global capital acquired through slavery, genocide, and extractive industry).¹⁰ These shifts led to the beginning of a new movement, one that arguably now underpins the contemporary art world and global culture itself: postmodernism.

While Marinetti's Futurism ultimately dissolved in the acids of authoritarian fascist regimes, his work and that of others of the movement explored the *present frame* of their experience as mostly European men (although there were quite a few notable women Futurists) in the first half of the twentieth century and utilized the *future stage* as a place to distill and expand their notions of what humanity and Western society could be. Italian Futurists did make their mark on the emergence of global culture, from car design, to brutalist architecture, to fashion and its impacts on the form of the body (a sort of proto-transhumanism), to being one of the first art movements to use a manifesto as the starting point of its artistic strategies and ethical intentions. Italian futurisms, while deeply flawed from the point of view of a postmodern critique, did what all futurisms do: they prophesied and defined emerging culture by playing upon the *future stage*.

Postmodern Futures of Decay, Indifference, Reclamation, and Liberation

Postmodernism is often defined as an antithesis to modernism and its ideals. No longer enchanted with the Eurocentric and white supremacist-informed notions of “universal” human qualities and progress-oriented metanarratives of Western colonial society perpetuated through Western science, colonial nation states, corporations, and other Western institutions (such as museums, schools, and political organizations), postmodernism in its critical forms seeks relativist ways of understanding the world by exploring the *immanent*, or individual and subjective frames of experience. With a skeptical orientation toward modernist idealism, which understood and defined reality through the seeking of universal truths (that were often inseparable from Eurocentrism), critical postmodernism came to reflect and be defined by novel *present frames* such as those held by Black, Indigenous, Asian, and other peoples of the global majority. These diverse *present frames* hold new potential understandings of the world liberated from modernist metanarratives. By exploring these immanent subjective frames through art and cultural theory, a plurality of perspectives that decentered Western colonial society begin to come into view and can be explored.

How then did postmodernism influence futurisms? If we can define modernist futurisms, such as Italian Futurism, as focused on futures that emerge from ideals of humanity's potential—encapsulated in industrial-age fantasies such as progress, efficiency, speed, and subjugation, then postmodernism (being antithetical to or critical of these ideals) would inhabit their opposite. Moira Roth's research on the rise of postmodern art in the United States from the 1950s onward defines an “aesthetic of indifference” that emerges from the

uncertainties of the Cold War, which followed the disillusionment of modernist metanarratives in the post-WWII period (Roth 1977/1998). Beyond this indifferent aesthetic and framework, postmodern futurisms often portray apocalyptic narratives of ecological collapse, nuclear holocausts, genetic engineering, or AI-induced singularities that threatened to destroy humanity and/or Earth. In these futurisms, modernity's hubris collapses in on itself. The suggestion is that Western science or cultural ideals that created these apocalyptic scenarios are rarely what saves us from them; instead, they lead to death, war, violence, and decay. Postmodern futurisms work upon a future stage that reflects the present frame of the very real threats of ecological collapse, the turbulence of Western colonial politics and culture, and the unknown potentials of rapidly complexifying science and technologies.

In the Wachowski sisters' *The Matrix* (1999), it is humanity's attempt to quell a sentient robot uprising through using weather modifications to block out the sun (the primary source of energy for the robots) that ultimately seals their fate as the robots adapt and take revenge by incubating humans to be used as bioelectric batteries. The only way to change this situation is by seeking "The One," a prophesized messiah who, carrying a hidden knowledge, has the potential to liberate humanity from this dystopian, robot-dominated reality of their own making. Postmodern futurisms often paint a bleak picture of the world, as in *The Matrix*, but the seeking of hidden knowledge, such as that which "The One" holds, opens the possibility of liberation from that bleakness. In postmodern futurisms, postmodernism's attention to relativism often takes the narrating forms of secret, hidden, ancient, sacred, or unknown knowledge that then have the potential to liberate people from the present frame of bleakness, indifference, apathy, or hopelessness and enable the emergence of new futures that would have previously seemed impossible or unknowable.

The epistemologies and knowledge of Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of the global majority, inherently carry "secret knowledge" or relativist frames that were either extracted from or misunderstood, overlooked, or subjugated by Western colonial regimes. Global futurisms based in their respective relativist frames carry diverse epistemologies and cosmologies that provide new ways of conceptualizing the *present frame* through exploring the *future stage* in which that relativist knowledge can ignite the emergence of new futures.

Afrofuturisms: Futures of Liberation and Identity Reclamation

Ytasha Womack, author of *Afrofuturism: The World of a Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, defines Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation." (Womack 2013, 13). Afrofuturism as an artistic movement centers aesthetics or philosophies in which African and African diasporic cultures are centered and inform the design of futuristic and speculative technologies, fashion, cities, and cultures. Although Afrofuturism as a term wasn't coined until 1994 by cultural theorist Mark Dery, what could now be considered an Afrofuturistic aesthetic was found in arts reaching back to the 1950s (see Dery 1994). Black jazz and funk artists Sun Ra and George Clinton, and science/speculative fiction writer Octavia Butler, even though their works existed before the term was developed, would all be reclaimed under the movement of Afrofuturism, as they explored futuristic themes and Black identity in their work (Womack 2013, 18).

The pioneering efforts of Black Afrofuturist artists such as these paved the way for the success of the most widely known piece of Afrofuturist media at the time of writing this, Marvel's blockbuster, *Black Panther* (2018). With a primarily Black cast, a Black director (Ryan Coogler), and a soundtrack of music by Black artists, *Black Panther* is novel in the world of superhero movies that are primarily focused on white characters and reflect Western colonial ideals and culture. The homeland of the characters of *Black Panther*, Wakanda, is a nation hidden in an area of East Africa, untouched by colonization, independently wealthy, sustainable, and technologically advanced due to a unique mineral mined from a meteor

that landed in the area centuries before called “vibranium.” These hidden technologies and forms of knowledge endow the main character and Prince of Wakanda, T’challa, with special powers that he uses to protect his people and help the world. T’challa often struggles with the decision of whether to keep his nation secret and his people safe, or to relieve suffering in the world by offering the advanced technologies of his nation.

The makers of the *Black Panther* movie deployed Afrofuturist aesthetics to design the society, characters, and setting of the fictional nation of Wakanda, a nation imagined by speculating on colonial history, African cultures, and Black identity. This provides opportunities for Afrofuturist culture to, as Womack (2013, 13) writes, “redefine culture and notions of Blackness for today and the future.” The hidden knowledge and technology of Wakanda holds the potential to liberate the world from that which threatens to destroy it. This recentering of Black identity and knowledge as having the power to save the world enables a reclamation of Blackness from “an abysmal sense of powerlessness,” asserting that “fatalism is not a synonym for Blackness” (Womack 2013, 16).

Womack asserts that Afrofuturisms “unchain the mind” of Black artists, allowing them to explore a future stage in which the present frame of Blackness informs the development of memetic cultural materials that have the potential to reclaim and recenter Black identities that can shape change, liberating Blackness from a present frame embedded in the history of Western colonization and slavery into emergent futures not enmeshed with Western colonialism (Womack 2013, 17).

Metamodernism

The cultural epochs of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism build upon each other, each reacting to, potentially integrating, and expanding beyond the previous epoch. Futurisms as speculations on the present frame are intertwined with and define the cultural epoch in which they are situated. Both Afrofuturisms and Indigenous futurisms are firmly rooted in the foundations of postmodernism, but I believe that all global futurisms can be situated within and define what is increasingly being called metamodernism.

Metamodernism was clearly defined in 2010 by cultural theorists Timotheus Vemeulan and Robin van den Akker, to describe a post-postmodern aesthetic or cultural mode that surpasses the ironic, indifferent, deconstructive, and skeptical postmodern aesthetic toward a “structure of feeling” in arts and culture that explores themes that seem to be at odds with postmodern aesthetics such as sincerity (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010). Unlike postmodernism, metamodernism is not an antithesis of the previous cultural epoch (in this case of postmodernism); instead it seeks an active “metaxis” or an in-between state of the cultural modes that came before it while also seeking to move beyond them. This in-between state is activated through an oscillation between states such as irony and sincerity, apathy and empathy, melancholy and hope, unity and plurality, naïveté and knowingness, and idealism and pragmatism. In this oscillation the subjective relativism and skepticism of postmodernism is contrasted while also being interwoven with the progress-oriented idealism of modernism.

As we face the challenges of our twenty-first-century collective crises such as climate change, we must take a sober look at these issues, one that is both critical and hopeful and idealistic so we may approach the complexity of our lived realities without feeling crushed beneath a nihilistic apathy. This sober contending with our lived realities can be thought of as a *pragmatic idealism* that allows us to configure our present frames in a way that invites complexity, navigating beyond the trappings of absolutes and ideals found in modernism, and the indifferent attitudes, as Roth argued in her article “The Aesthetic of Indifference,” that stem from the anxieties surrounding modernism’s failures and the seemingly unending plurality of relativist postmodern frames in which many conflicting truths may exist. What

emerges out of this oscillation between both modern and postmodern modes is what could be defined as a teleological intent toward *transcendence*, a seeking of what lies beyond the immanent frame while remaining unchained to a naïve idealism.

This teleological intent toward transcendence carries metamodern Futurisms beyond postmodernism, both maintaining and stepping past the liberatory intent with which postmodern futurisms often engage. To use *The Matrix* again as an example, we are not shown much of what happens once the world is liberated from robot and AI dominion using the hidden knowledge of “The One.” This encourages us to posit the question: What occurs after liberation? Postmodern futurisms often imply that *something* occurs after liberation, but the aesthetic of indifference that results from postmodernism’s critique of modernism frequently leaves a vacuum concerning what lies beyond this liberation. Metamodernism works directly with this question through the seeking of transcendence.

Metamodern theorists such as Brendan Graham Dempsey conceptualize this transcendence as something innately personal and even *spiritual*. For Dempsey, it is a frame of *immanent transcendence* that is not claimed to be universal and does not exist solely as ideal nor as something to be liberated from but as something to be reckoned with personally through an *informed naïveté*, or a sincere and willful seeking of transcendence that may or may not be graspable but still worthy of contending with the complexity and dire difficulties of our lived realities to approach (Severan and Dempsey 2021, 24). This informed naïveté allows one not to collapse under the plurality of relativist frames and their contrasting truths but seek within them an integration or oscillation between truths that potentially transcends them.

Metamodern futurisms then play upon future stages that emerge from a present frame of immanent transcendence anchored and fortified by informed naïveté and pragmatic idealism. As futurisms are potent generators of cultural material that are suited to contend with complexifying present frames, they are specially situated to explore new pragmatically idealistic metanarratives that have the potential to shape change and global culture, as all futurisms have done before them. In this way, metamodern futurisms reinfuse the critical nature of postmodern futurisms with the idealism of modernism through exploring earnestness, hopefulness, and spirituality informed directly by the limitations of both modernism and postmodernism.

Indigenous Futurisms: Futures of Transcendence and Reciprocal Technologies

Indigenous Futurism follows in the footsteps of Afrofuturism as an artistic movement that explores the reclamation and recentering of Indigenous identities and forms of knowledge that inform and are situated inside, outside, and beyond Western colonial society. My personal experience of creating and studying Indigenous futurisms has enabled me to work toward reclaiming and recentering my indigeneity, allowing me to move beyond an aesthetic of indifference or apathy by working with ideas of future stages that are already liberated from the dystopian futures depicted in postmodern futurisms and the very real lived dystopian experience of colonization through the application of relativist frames of Indigenous knowledge (see Figure 19.1).

The postmodern futurisms of decay, apocalypse, and potential liberation are lived realities of Indigenous peoples. The strategies of violence and division of Western colonization such as genocide, forced removal, assimilation, slavery, ecological destruction, and extraction have been and continue to be used as tools to bring about dystopian realities for Indigenous peoples the world over. As Dillon (2012, 8) states, “[i]t is almost commonplace to think that the Native Apocalypse, if contemplated seriously, has already taken place.” While these apocalyptic realities are very much continuing, they are also being mitigated through the active survival of Indigenous peoples. In some ways one could argue that Indigenous peoples have already survived and even been liberated from apocalyptic realities and are now living in a



FIGURE 19.1 Timotéo Montoya, *T'a'jaazbee Doodaastsadah Da'didlo (Vulture Death Dance)*, 2021. This is a frame captured from a live multimedia concept performance titled *Ancestraplex 15462*. In this piece, the *T'a'jaazbee Doodaastsadah Da'didlo* is conducted to upload the *memory:spirits* of the recently deceased to the Ancestraplex, an indestructible repository of ancestral knowledge and wisdom only accessible by their decedents. This piece explores how technologies can be used to maintain epistemologies and generational knowledge, ensuring its safety from apocalypse or decay. Courtesy of Timoteo Montoya.

post-apocalypse. From this present frame of Indigenous post-apocalypse, Indigenous peoples carry technologies of cosmological, cultural, and ecological adaptation that have been and continue to be used to meet the massive changes and threats to their lifeways.

If we are to consider Indigenous futurisms as potential metamodern futurisms, this survivance through apocalypse is the liberatory foundation of their transcendent intent. Indigenous futurisms can create upon future stages in which the post-apocalypse has been adapted to and reconfigured through Indigenous cosmologies and cultures to create thriving, hopeful futures that utilize ecological and cosmological technologies to honor reciprocal ways of being. I describe these Indigenous cultures as reciprocal and generative or “life-giving” for they are inextricably interwoven to the land, our more-than-human kin, and Earth, such that one species, watershed, mountain, forest, or relative’s health and vitality impacts the health and vitality of the human community.

Due to this interwoven relationship between Indigenous peoples and their ecosystems, the health of their communities are eco-cultural barometers for the destructive impacts of modernism’s idealism and the effects of extractive industry, climate collapse, white supremacy, and racism. But Indigenous peoples are not silent victims of these apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic realities; the ingenious nature of their cosmologies and epistemologies and their use of technology “modern” and otherwise to meet these devastating realities provide fertile present frames of adaptation that allow for exploration of future stages that strive toward liberation, decolonization, and reciprocal and generative lifeways that transcend dystopian postmodern futures.

Reclamation of Technology

The term technology is not limited to what we often consider as “modern” technology, such as computers, microchips, cameras, or cars. The etymology of the word technology is as follows: *techne*, coming from Greek meaning art, skill, or craft used to fabricate, create, or weave, and *logos*, meaning the theory, discourse, science, or doctrine of that skill. Many

Indigenous lifeways can be considered as technologies that create reciprocal realities through using complex sciences and discourses. With this reconsideration of technology, Indigenous peoples can be reframed as ecological and cosmological technologists, whose technology is held in oral traditions, language, and the body. Indigenous peoples use story, song, dance, and material technologies such as the digging stick (used to tend “wild” horticultural landscapes throughout the world) to create new ecologies bound to epistemologies and cosmologies that carry teleological intents toward reciprocity and sustainability that are anything but primitive, being based on thousands upon thousands of years of Indigenous sciences developed through careful observation and engagement with complex ecosystems. When Indigenous oral traditions are viewed through this relativist technological lens, dance, song, and oral narrative can be seen to carry the intent of a creative act of reciprocity or remembrance that imbues both human and ecosystem with greater health and vitality.

While working at The Cultural Conservancy, I was struck by an interview we conducted with Renee Pualani Louis, an Indigenous cartographer, in which she described her research on Indigenous spatial knowledge systems, place names, and hula, which is a Pacific Island multi-sensuous engagement with place through chant, dance, movement, and story.¹¹ It is such practices that take the place of modern maps and forms of navigation. In this way, hula is a multi-sensuous technology that imbues the participant with the knowledge necessary to understand their spatial reality and engage with place.

Technology as Adaptation

When we consider Indigenous peoples as ecological and cosmological technologists we may also speculate on how technology has been used to change or adapt to an ecosystem. This contrasts with the common Western idea of Indigenous peoples as primitive hunter gathers simply living off wild bounty, defining them rather as stewards of complex anthropogenic landscapes using ecological and cosmological technologies to understand and tend to their reciprocal connection with them. Adapting to our current lived realities through technologies is not a novel concept. My tribe, the Lipan Apache, were traditionally nomadic peoples who moved across many different ecosystems throughout time, adapting as they did so through complex systems of oral tradition and technologies that enabled them to meet their needs in reciprocal ways that honored the lands upon which they relied and ensured their continued health and vitality. The use of technology shifted when Indigenous peoples were confronted with colonization; at this point, their legacy of adaptation through technology was directed toward survivance. The Lipan Apache were under the political and warlike aggressions of the Spanish, the Republic of Texas, Mexico, and the US government for over 400 years. The adoption of the rifle, a “modern” technology, to protect themselves and assert their right to self-determine their realities was necessary for their survivance. This legacy of adaptability is often overlooked as just an instinct for survival; I argue that it was a concerted, conscious use of technology that would support their sovereignty. This legacy of adaptation through the use of technology can be seen as a reclamation of Indigenous people’s designation as technologists who made use of complex present frames of ecological, cosmological, and “modern” technologies to adapt. Through Indigenous futurisms, the reclamation of this legacy allows us to consider how we might use “modern” technologies alongside ecological and cosmological technologies that meet the needs of thriving futures.

What I believe makes Indigenous futurisms largely metamodern is that they are inextricably tied to the lived reality of the decay of modernist idealism and are thus critical of it due to the impact it had on Indigenous peoples. At the same time, they utilize “modern” technology with a teleological intent toward honoring reciprocity and securing sovereignty,



FIGURE 19.2 Cannupa Cannupa Hanska Luger—"Future Ancestral Technologies: We Survive You," billboard, Mandan, ND, 2021. For Landback.art, in Collaboration with NDN Collective, INDÍGENA, For Freedoms. This billboard by Hanska Luger, an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, and Lakota), features images of his "Future Ancestral Technology" textile and regalia work which focuses on exploring methodologies of "future dreaming" through Indigenous Science Fiction works that seek to develop sustainable technologies. The text, "We Survive You," highlights the survivance of Indigenous peoples beyond apocalypse. Courtesy of Freedoms and Cannupa Hanska Luger / Photograph by Justin Deegan and Gabe Fermin.

an intent that oscillates between idealism and pragmatism but also transcends this duality, working with an informed naïveté and a conviction that their lifeways are vital to a thriving future and that must meet the challenges of Western colonialism, and have done so before, moving beyond apocalyptic liberation toward a transcendent potential (see Figure 19.2).

Indigenous Futurists are then creating upon a future stage that utilizes the complex present frame of post-apocalyptic reality to continue re/constructing an ideal based on their unique worldviews and cosmologies. Playing on this future stage in which all our complex reality is contended with opens the doors to metamodern futurisms that are infused with *hope*.

Prophecy/Prophecy as Hope

I have used the term prophesy to describe the process of predicting the future, and potentially creating futurisms based on those speculations. Prophesy as an act of imaging the future by creating the novel memetic cultural potentials that enable the future to emerge is exactly what futurisms do, whether they are hopeful or dystopian. What then is the difference between prophesy and *prophecy*? Prophecy is a noun that describes a prediction or metanarrative created by individuals or groups of people that divine the future through visions, altered states, or experiences with the divine. Prophesy is a verb meaning to say a particular thing will happen in the future, a prediction. The line between prophesy and prophecy is a spiritual one. In Indigenous futurisms this line is thin, due to the spiritual and

cosmological ontology of Indigenous peoples, and the way in which they receive and pass on knowledge. It is my intention to invite Indigenous Futurists to consider this narrow divide as they speculate upon the future stage and create futurisms that carry within them the same spiritual potency of the prophecies of their peoples, re/constructing an original intent that has been passed down to them through oral histories and the instructions of their people. For prophecy/prophesy is the very thing that holds a transcendent teleological intent, or idealistic metanarrative, which supports the revitalization of the world via Indigenous cosmological and ecological technologies. This is where the power of meta-modern oscillation is so needed because to create a prophecy of the future from a purely idealist and universalizing mode ignores the complexity of our lived realities and the plurality of relativist frames. The informed naïveté or pragmatic idealism of metamodernism invites us into the complexity of our present frame, allowing us to explore futures stages in which that complexity is directly contended with.

The prophecies/prophesies created through Indigenous futurisms are then the condensed memetic cultural potentials needed to engage with the complexity of the present frame toward a transcendent protopian future. The great gift of this informed naïveté or pragmatic idealism for Indigenous futurisms, which I believe is much easier to engage with as Indigenous peoples are already familiar with post-apocalyptic realities, provides the potential for profound hope—a hope untethered from naïve idealism and grounded in the pragmatic reality of the effects of Western colonialism on Indigenous peoples and the world at large. This hope engendered through metamodern futurisms is vital to continuously engaging with the world and our potential futures from a place that transcends the bleakness of postmodern futurisms.

Global Futurisms are Vital to a Protopian Future

As we move through the twenty-first century, the need to contend with complexifying global societies and their impact on the environment is vital to a future in which the dystopian indifference of postmodernism isn't the final destination of humanity and Earth. By maintaining an informed naïveté in the work of creating global futurisms, artists can create condensed memetic cultural materials that enable the emergence of futures that are inconceivable to Western colonialism, while still contending with the realities of a world dominated by Western colonialism. I hope through the analysis in this chapter that it is clear that futurisms are not simply fantasies or innocent fawnings from the present frame about the future but real and valid imaginings of potential emergent futures that can and will shape change, in small and large ways, toward protopian futures. The need for a plurality of futurisms that can be shared and expanded upon in a global context, based in specific relative frames like those of Afrofuturisms, Hawaiian futurisms, Amazofuturisms, etc., will enable us to inform emergent futures that work to confront the unique challenges we collectively face, moving us toward tomorrows that are better than today.

Notes

- 1 I use quotation marks around “modern” to distinguish it as a specific understanding of Western colonial modernity that is often in contrast to “primitive” or “ancient” cultures and societies. “Primitive” and “ancient” are often used to describe Indigenous cultures that have always been modern and situated in the present.
- 2 Traditional Ecological Knowledge describes the living systems of ecological technology and sciences specific to Indigenous peoples and their ancestral territories.

- 3 There are many terms and descriptions that can be used to define Western, Euro-American, society. I choose to use the term Western colonial as it delineates clearly the origin as European and the vehicle (colonization) multiple European countries deployed to subjugate and enslave Indigenous peoples throughout the world.
- 4 I define the term “reconnected native” as an Indigenous person who was not born upon or was removed from their traditional territories and cultures and is actively reconnecting to the land, people, and culture of their heritage. This need to reconnect is a legacy of forced assimilation, genocide, and diaspora. This term is one that has seen a rise in use online and on social media to explain this phenomenon of “assimilated” Indigenous peoples reconnecting with their heritage.
- 5 Survivance is a term that mixes the words “survival” and “resistance,” coined by Indigenous cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor used this term to describe the ongoing process of change via resistance for Indigenous peoples. This is used to replace the static nature of the term “survival” into an active state or verb untethered to stories of colonial dominance.
- 6 Originally defined by Rosemary Campbell-Stephens and expanded upon here as Black, Indigenous, Brown, Asian, and multi-heritage peoples whose ancestral and current territories and nations largely experienced colonization, many of whom exist in the southern hemisphere, and whose lives are most often threatened by extractive industries and ecological collapse. Furthermore, I use the term re/construct in this sentence to highlight that there are both those creating wholly new ways of being and thinking and those who are simply continuing to hold an original instruction (traditional teaching/prophecy/creation story) their peoples have been continuously holding since their emergence. Reconstructing is continuing the original intent after the disruption of colonization, constructing is creating new intents and purposes.
- 7 Vine Deloria is an Indigenous theorist, his writings were the first that offered this reframe on the fairly popular notion of The seven generations is being solely the seven generations ahead of us. See Wilkins (2015).
- 8 Memetic is an adjective describing the transference of cultural materials, or memes, such as ideas, behaviors, or style, from person to person. Meme is a term coined by Dawkins (1976) to describe “a unit of cultural transmission.” When referring to something as memetic it is defining it as something that creates a replication of concepts from person to person. In this context, this replication is driven by the need to define and share complex ideas and experiences.
- 9 Adrienne Maree Brown’s work uses novelist Octavia Butler’s philosophy of “God is Change, Shape God,” from Butler (2019) Shape change is a process that asserts change as a constant, that can only be shaped, not ended or transformed into some final potential. See Brown (2021, 4). On Kelly’s protopia, see Kelly (2011).
- 10 Metanarratives are sociocultural theories or narratives that interpret events or circumstances, providing patterns and structures that create meaning and inform the beliefs of collective, communal, and individual experiences. See Lyotard (1997).
- 11 Renee Pualani Louis, interview with Melissa Nelson, *The Native Seed Pod* podcast, episode 14 (February 1, 2020); available online at: <https://www.nativeseedpod.org/podcast/2020/ep14-renee-pualani-louis-hawaiian-cartography>.

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DIASPORA

Transnational Collectivities of Solidarity and Affect

Ceren Özpınar

Diasporas are community formations that, in Khachig Tölölyan's words, make "a transnational collectivity, broken apart by, and woven together across, the borders of their own and other nation-states, maintaining cultural and political institutions" (Tölölyan [1991] 2008, 232). While the term once primarily described the dispersed Jewish, Greek, and Armenian communities, in the wake of increasing waves of human movements in the late twentieth century, it has evolved to refer to any transnational collective that has been dispersed from a place that can be called a homeland. Therefore, many different groups and identities are often classed as diaspora today, as noted by Steven Vertovec, despite the differences they hold with regard to the cause, nature, or terms of their dispersal. In the absence of any disparate distinctions, diasporas thus encompass many groups that connect and cultivate alliances across the borders, such as immigrants, expatriates, refugees, labor migrants, temporary migrants, exiles, overseas communities, ethnic or minoritized communities, and international students. Evidently, all these groups are sustained by various forms of global connectivity, social organization, and progressed forms of mobility (Vertovec 2010). Moreover, as Kobena Mercer and Paul Gilroy have observed, what conditions them is also "a polycentric network of cross-cultural routes" that forge their transnational character (Gilroy cited in Mercer 2021, 485). With the multitude of ties and mechanisms of support, diasporas are thus in a strong position to nurture communities with a potential to develop and transform subjectivities rooted in these networks of relationships, linking them to multiple social fields and localities that traverse political, cultural, and territorial confines (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994).

But diasporas are also spatial formations characterized by translocal encounters. In what Avtar Brah (1996, 178–181) calls the "diaspora space," the experiences of travel, maintenance of ties with family and friends, and memories of the place of departure can be reproduced together with experiences of relocation, generation of milieus, leading to sustained discoveries of new transcultural selves. Evidently, engagements with multiple localities are mediated differently in each diasporic generation, with significant variances in relation to class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Distinct histories and networks also contribute

to differences in engagement and the forming of new subjectivities whereby, for example, postcolonial condition marks identities differently than those that emerge from post-conflict contexts. Thus, the grounding of subjectivity diverges among diaspora spaces, and under different circumstances, diasporic conditions and identities can be reproduced and lived very differently. Accordingly, in diaspora space, encounters with what has been construed as “inhabitant” and “visiting” communities constantly occur. Such divisive categories have for so long placed diaspora in binary opposition with notions such as home and homeland, charging it with a fixed origin and an ideology of return. Clearly, these discourses also often lie at the root of enmities against diasporic communities. In diaspora space, however, as Brah proposes, communities and selves from all origins and specificities can engage with each other on socially and politically equal terms, contributing to the constitution of identities together. This view, through its translocal engagement with locations such as home and homeland and the transcultural production of new identities, challenges subject positions that advance separatism across ethnic and racial lines along with the divisive thinking that hinges on nativist beliefs underpinning the nation state (Brah 1996, 188–189).

In this respect, aesthetic categories such as diaspora art and diaspora artist appear to reinforce the limitations of this type of binary thinking. Ascribing artistic processes to a specific set of material and a certain location, they often link their makers—nearly every person of color artist who has ever lived in the diaspora—by their otherness. Defining the concept of diaspora artist, for example, Eddie Chambers places an emphasis on Britain’s Black others, who, as a result of their difference, have largely been written out of British art histories (Chambers 2022). Referring to Chambers’s notion, Deborah Cherry similarly draws a definitive model for diaspora artists, linking the works of practitioners by their “diasporic conditions” and use of photography as an agent of memory (Cherry 2017, 800). Although Cherry sees this framework functioning to contest the assumptions about stories of diaspora and migration, it nevertheless denies the broader interpretative capacities of those artworks. Rasheed Araeen, on the other hand, has often confronted in his writing such aesthetic expectations from those who were speculatively attributed to a diaspora. Araeen has observed a steady feeling of anticipation for those artists to be critical about their place of departure, as they have been subjected to a belief that all diasporas have suffered trauma, displacement, and loss (Araeen 2000). This supposition has often demarcated artists from creating their own subject position “based on free will and choice” (Araeen 1999). In a similar vein, Salwa Mikdadi (cited in Bernardi and Étienne 2011, 32–33) has recognized the prevalent devices in art history that “essentialize” artists by location, which pose a limitation to the understanding of wider referential frameworks that may be operative, and refuse to accept those who might have “a home in multiple places” (Mercer 2021, 485). Jane Chin Davidson’s study on contemporary Chinese art echoes these views by problematizing too easily made connections between cultural objects and their makers’ residency or citizenship, which often bypass a myriad of affiliations that could be made by attending more closely to questions of style or practice (Chin Davidson 2019, 5–6).

Here, diaspora is understood as a transnational community as well as a transnational space that creative practitioners may have chosen to intersect with at times. Therefore, they are not identified as makers who refer to certain aesthetic conditions and categories because of their citizenship, displacement, or cultural descent, but as subjects with agency who make a conscious decision to critically approach the politics of self, history, and place. As a feminist researcher from Turkey whose personal and professional life has been intertwined with diasporic communities and diaspora spaces, in this chapter I focus on Turkey’s diasporas, both within its geographical borders and beyond. Considering that the transnational community formations concerning the country are plural, dynamic, and refute national impositions and structures, I find it implausible to speak of a singular homogeneous diaspora space, identity, or community. Indeed, creative practitioners who have become involved in one or more of these diasporas not only come from diverse backgrounds, generations, gender,

ethnic heritage, and class but also engage with translocal and transnational experiences differently. Therefore, with a view to elucidating encounters and togetherness in care, ethics, feminist solidarity, and social justice, I discuss aesthetic works and acts that intently cross the barriers of localities, nations, cultures, and identities. Emphasizing the critical, affective potentials they offer, in the first part I discuss Nil Yalter's long-term collaborative project called *Exile is a Hard Job* (2012–). As a multi-sited and multi-lingual work, this project points viewers toward a view of a global diaspora community with which individuals from any class, race, or gender could connect in solidarity. Paying attention to the terminological differences among exile, diaspora, and *gurbetlik* (a related Turkish-Kurdish term, which I define later), I explore the emotive dimensions of the work that unlocks a symbolic world vision for a transcultural viewership. In the second part, I consider those artworks that transnationally and translocally engage with diaspora communities that are marked by imperial, colonial, or national power. Focusing on Ezgi Kılınçaslan's and Zehra Doğan's practices, I investigate how past and present struggles and resistances are mediated through reparative histories and feminist solidarities across regional and geographical borders. Finally, the final part of the chapter reflects on two of Güneş Terkol's banners, which as a collectively made art project are conceived with an intersectional and transnational feminist ethos, and foreground the distinct and affective subject positions of diaspora communities and selves.

Diaspora as an Emotive Tool

In 2019, some black-and-white fly-posters appeared overnight in the streets of Cologne, Germany. A family with four children were looking back at passers-by from the posters. In what seem to be the photographs of a working-class family of color, the images were copied a few times, and in some of them, figures appeared to be fading away. Over these photos, the phrase “Exile is a hard job” was directly painted in bright red, overflowing the large frame of the poster. Developed by the visual artist Nil Yalter (b. 1938), the *Exile is a Hard Job* project has taken place in the public space of some vast metropolitan areas around the world since 2012, including Paris, Istanbul, New York, Mumbai, and Valencia (Figure 20.1).



FIGURE 20.1 Nil Yalter, *Exile is a Hard Job* (Walls VII). Posters in the streets of Cologne, Germany, 2019. Artist is seen in the making of the work.

The work was originally a part of the photograph series featuring working-class members of the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora communities in Paris, who were captured by the artist in the late 1970s. Recently adopting an activist, collaborative character that transgresses the borders of artistic authorship and contemporary display culture, the work has been recreated in each location by Yalter and a group of volunteers.¹ Choosing upscale central neighborhoods and art districts to increase the public visibility of the project, the work in one way intends to call the attention of the upper echelons to the experiences of migrant workers. But more importantly, a greater part of it is carried out in areas where diaspora communities live in high numbers, in which case the phrase “Exile is a hard job” is translated into the many languages spoken, such as Polish, Arabic, Chinese, Kurdish, and Spanish, ensuring that the work speaks to every person who gazes over the posters.

Settled in Paris in 1965, Yalter’s work has intersected with diaspora communities several times. In her early work such as *Topak Ev* (1973), the artist focused on histories of violence that continue to underpin the lives of dispersed Turkmen nomads in central Anatolia. In France, she connected with a myriad of communities, including an international group of women artists *Femmes en Lutte*, who created works with a Marxist–feminist attitude, a grassroots communist solidarity organization between Turkey and France, and minoritized Turkish and Kurdish populations of Paris (Yücel 2013). The work that stemmed from the collaborations with the latter groups, such as *Turkish Immigrants* (1977–1983), often produced photographic portraits, which were sometimes visually manipulated, and recordings of the subjects’ voices, which either in the form of text or speech recounted their own stories. As I have discussed elsewhere, for a long time the artist’s role in these works, other than being the mediator, was often seen as similar to that of an ethnographer (Özpinar 2021, 81). Yet, Yalter’s lasting and intimate engagement with members of these communities meant more than that. Crossing over the perceived barriers of class and ethnicity, the artist linked histories and cultures of several localities in France and Turkey with each other, while also connecting the people who identify with them. This not only meant building solidarity across the borders but also created capacity for what Nira Yuval-Davis calls “transversal politics,” which acknowledges different selves and communities connecting over “common feminist and emancipatory political perspectives” (Yuval-Davis 2006).

Although Yalter sometimes used the term “immigrants” in the title of her works to denote the communities she cooperated with, from the early 1980s onwards another word—“exile”—has emerged in her artistic vocabulary, as in *Exile is a Hard Job*, gradually replacing the divisive disposition implied in the first notion. This happened just before the same term emerged in the art world in the 1990s, which at the time perhaps aligned more with “expatriation” (see Nochlin 1996). The same period, however, also saw the emergence of differing opinions on the use of this terminology. For example, tackling the functions of exile, refugee, and migrant in 1984, Czech-Brazilian Jewish philosopher Vilem Flusser (1920–1991) argued in favor of terms such as “exile” and “expelled.” As someone who had been forced to move a few times in his lifetime, Flusser proposed that everyone was once expelled from somewhere, and all of us somehow live in exile today, and that “no matter what form it takes, [exile] is a breeding ground for creative activity, for the new” (Flusser 2002, 109). While more generally the term may designate individuals or groups who were forced to be separated from a place, the author’s particular reading indicates a world, perhaps similar to a diaspora space, where the disconnected communities can be unified. Likewise, Yalter valued the term exile affirmatively in her work, understanding lived experiences and sentiments in their own specificities but also seeing them as something over which these communities can transversally meet. The artist’s reclaiming of the word perhaps also had a relevance to the fact that Yalter herself felt effectively exiled as she could not travel back to Turkey for thirteen years (between 1980 and 1993) because of her political involvements (Kaya and Winchester 2009). As previously pointed out, not all diaspora stories involve negative experiences that could lead to an adverse knowledge of the word

“exile”; they might involve instead some elements, for example, in regard to resistance, which can be deployed as an emotive yet critical tool.

Indeed, the title of Yalter’s work is taken from the very last verse of the love poem by Nazım Hikmet (1902–1963) entitled “From Sofia” and written in 1957. The revolutionary poet spent many years in prison for communist propaganda before he finally left the country of his own volition in 1951. After his departure, however, he was stripped of his Turkish citizenship, hence when he wrote this poem Hikmet was de facto *exiled*. As with much of his poetry, “From Sofia” also nurtures Hikmet’s longing for his two beloveds: Istanbul and his wife. Yalter’s mobilization of this phrase, then, opens the possibility of tying her work to an emotionally charged world through which a political alliance with radical artists such as Hikmet—whose poetry operates also as a means of resistance and dissent—can be conceptually established. But also, it is instructive to look at the form of transposition Yalter has undertaken when adapting the said verse to her work. Here the poet refers to the particular notion in Turkish and Kurdish that is called *gurbetlik*, as he writes: “*Gurbetlik* is a tough, tough trade.” Although a concept hard to pin down, *gurbetlik* does not mean exile but rather signifies a place abroad where one lives temporarily (but voluntarily) for a variety of reasons. As Latif Taş observes, it does not mean diaspora either, as this term more generally points to groups of migrating people rather than a place (Taş 2013). Yet, the word shares emotive associations with both exile and diaspora, which rest on their capability to elicit a certain state of mind that is on par with homesickness. Moreover, what is crucially inherent to *gurbetlik* is the provision of a diaspora space that grants people the agency to redefine their own relation to a place, and as such, to form subjective relations with more than one locality at the same time, rejecting the putative obligation of being situated in either “where one lives now” or “where one came from.”

Marsha Meskimmon characterizes artworks that bear a critical potential similar to those of *Exile is a Hard Job* as examples of “worldmaking denizenship.” The processes of creation and engagement these works present, in her words, “engender forms of embodied and participatory worldmaking that challenge the limits of exclusive and normative citizenship” (Meskimmon 2020, 62). Hence worldmaking artists maintain intersubjective dialogue and interaction while underscoring the affective agency of art and “different possibilities for the future” that it could materialize (Meskimmon 2020, 52). Correspondingly, Yalter’s transposing *gurbetlik* into English as “exile” brings a politically charged context from the past into the streets, questioning politics of place and identity. This former context belongs to a specific time and geography, which is far removed or distant from the spaces where the work meets viewers. Yet, the emotive associations of the phrase, alongside the family photographs, create the possibility for viewers—whether they feel expelled from a place—as well as participants to connect over the vision of a diaspora space. Placing them in a dialogue that crosses national and cultural borders—and unifying transnational diaspora communities at large through a sense of solidarity—this vision signals a world in which social equality and political justice could be achieved, reminding viewers of those who have resisted and those who have fought for them.

Restoring Communities

Commenting on the transnational ties that diasporic communities form, Tölölyan points out the complicated relationship diasporas have with structures of the nation state, which undeniably inform their foundation if not undermine it. For, as Tölölyan notes, diasporas “embody the question of borders, which is at the heart of any adequate definition of the Others of the nation state. The latter always imagines and represents itself as a land, a territory, a place that functions as the site of homogeneity” (Tölölyan [1991] 2008, 233–234). Against a background of a power relationship, diasporic communities have therefore been

compelled to remain “self-protectively silent about their own view of themselves” for a long time, as “their self-representations and assignments of meaning to their collective existence have been carefully policed” (Tölölyan [1991] 2008, 233–234). However, in the last few decades, these communities ever increasingly engage with each other, whether symbolically or materially, strengthening political, economic, and social ties that nurture and help reimagine their own collectivity. Transgressing geographical, cultural, and national boundaries, these self-organized and grassroots movements have fostered cultures of community that question the rigid relationship so often established between place and identity in dominant discourses. Continuously transforming selves in diaspora spaces these communities increasingly become undefinable by narrow associations made solely based on a single site (Basch et al. 1994, 8). Some of the ethnically diverse, minoritized communities in Turkey, particularly the Armenian and the Kurdish people who have enduringly been the subject of biopolitical violence, are such diasporic collectivities. Marked by imperial and colonial histories and fostered by the sentiments of transnational co-ethnicity, these diasporas carry the possibilities of bonding over a “shared imagination” formed through aesthetic acts and collective creativity (Cohen 1996, 516). Holding them together while enhancing a political project these acts of bonding have shown the potential to stimulate solidarities across borders.

Visual artist and filmmaker Ezgi Kılınçaslan’s (b. 1973) work offers this kind of aesthetic allegiance, forming a practice that cares for the untold histories that have emerged from the Armenian community in the last decades. In *Grandmas Project* (2011), for example, produced in collaboration with Laure de Selys, the artist traces the stories of two elderly women of Armenian descent from Lebanon, Elizabeth Kechegian and Berjuhie Erzurumian, whose families were among the thousands who fled from Adana (southern Turkey) in the aftermath of the systemic annihilation of Armenians under the Ottoman imperial rule. Adana had historically been an agricultural seat of power in the area with a significant Armenian population and established social and cultural institutions (Matossian 2011). Leading up to the genocide in 1915–1916—when it is estimated that around a million Armenians were eradicated—the outset of the ethnic-nationalist campaigns also swept across the town, later becoming notorious as the Adana Massacres of 1909. Kılınçaslan’s work with Elizabeth and Berjuhie materializes stories both preceding and succeeding these events of violence and conflict, which were passed down in turn from their grandparents, particularly by harnessing the energy of personal objects and photographs that evoke anecdotal narration, singing, and affective storytelling. It seems the ability to be immersed in such a vast visual and material archive of experiences encouraged the two women to tend a sentimental connection to Adana, which was once home to their ancestors. This attachment points to Brah’s notion that compares the diasporic subject’s imagery of home to a “mythic place of desire” (Brah 1996, 192). As a place (a vision or a concept) that is imagined and experienced differently through every subjectivity, it takes shape from a mesh of recollections, sensations, and emotions unique to individual selves. Informed by this project, Kılınçaslan’s *Discrepancies* (2016) similarly tracks down histories of genocide within the Armenian diaspora communities of Beirut and Paris. Filmed with thirty-seven individuals who revisit the stories they consciously or unconsciously acquired over the years, the work creates fragmented but instructive new narratives. Holding the power of healing diaspora communities, these “reparative histories” restore local and global links between past and present political confrontations (Bergin and Rupprecht 2018, 25).

The Kurdish community’s situation, on the other hand, has often been characterized in the following terms: they live “in disputed homelands that overlap with those of other people, and the territory [Kurdistan] they claim has ambiguous and indeterminate boundaries” (Khalidi cited in Eliassi 2016). As a matter of fact, Kurdish communities have been forced to live separately under the national jurisdictions and pertinent necropolitical regimes of Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Turkey for over a century (Yıldırım 2021). Indeed, it is now common knowledge that these four states have systematically administered forms of colonial violence

and oppression “to deal with what is often called the ‘Kurdish question,’” which entailed assimilation, massacre, and displacement (Eliassi 2016). For this reason, the Kurdish community is defined as a transnational collectivity that regularly shares solidarities within but also beyond the Kurdish geography in order to strengthen their social, political, and cultural constitution, which is multi-sited and multi-experienced.

This particular character of Kurdish culture is consistent with the aesthetic acts of painter and journalist Zehra Doğan (b. 1989). The artist had been a political prisoner in Turkey for nearly three years, following her arrest in 2017 because of her coverage of the Turkish armed forces’ destruction of Nusaybin (a Kurdish city in southeast Turkey). At the time, Doğan was working for Jin News Agency (JinHA), which she had co-founded in 2011 and consisted of a women-only team committed to an anti-sexist and anti-militarist approach to journalism. During Doğan’s confinement, a public sphere of solidarity was generated worldwide by those who stand against contemporary forms of fascism, including the artist Ai Weiwei, indicating their support for her. Using transient materials, during that time the artist produced works addressing questions of social justice and gender equality as manifested in her detailed, figurative compositions, almost exclusively crowded with female figures.

The imposition of “patriarchal hierarchies of nationalism” in relation to identity, body, and sexuality is a particular concern that Doğan seeks to highlight in her own work but also through her various artistic collaborations (Chin Davidson 2019, 7). The artist maintained this precise line of aesthetic and political questioning after her release, further catalyzing her work to draw Kurdish communities and individuals together. Indeed, cooperating with artists and activists, Doğan performed creative actions and works in European cultural hubs such as Berlin, London, and Milan. Of particular importance was her collaboration with a grassroots organization in 2018, the Kurdish Art Fair in London, where some of her prison works were curated alongside the productions of the local Kurdish communities. Doğan’s engagement with those communities beyond translocal connections serves to forge symbolic and material relations that point toward mutual support in relation to the enduring Kurdish political struggle and a heightened desire for an alternative political future. Furthering these goals, Doğan and six fellow artists in 2021 also established an art collective called Xwebûn in Sulaymaniyah (a Kurdish city in northern Iraq). The collective is not only interested in addressing nationalism’s authoritative grip on Kurdish cultural and social identities but also in the extent to which national structures of hetero-normative patriarchy affect the ways and forms in which subjectivities relate to gender and sexuality. In search of crossovers between resistant feminist and queer communities across Kurdistan, Xwebûn’s synergy increases awareness of complexities in articulating diverse sexualities in repressive situations locally and globally.

Transforming Selves in Togetherness

The discussion of Xwebûn’s feminist and queer strategies brings me now to painter and visual artist Güneş Terkol (b. 1981), whose banner project is a long-term, collectively produced series initiated in 2010, stemming from the artist’s fascination with women’s suffrage banners she encountered during a visit to London’s Women’s Library. Terkol has so far completed eight banners working with communities in Berlin, Chongqing, Istanbul, Antakya, London, Prato, and Vienna. Reaching seventeen participants in the most attended workshop, she often worked with small-sized groups, which ensured the much-needed intimacy and time to concentrate on each contributor individually, whether for a week or a month. Although initially Terkol predominantly engaged with women-oriented communities, she has proceeded to involve individuals of diverse genders and sexualities. Their participation is secured on a voluntary basis through the support of grassroots

community organizations or art institutions that are known to be invested in inclusive practices, such as the International Antakya Biennial or Berlin's "post-migrant" theater Ballhaus Naunynstraße, whose performances endorse the perspectives of QTBIPOC communities. Depending on the organization that the artist collaborated with, each group would acquire a different character. For example, in Antakya the participants were women whose partners were engaged in long-term employment abroad, in London a council house community of diverse backgrounds, in Berlin members of diaspora communities from Turkey.

It is thought that Terkol's banners intend to question women's roles and identities, tackling inequality, representation, and violence against women (Erdamar 2020). But I would argue that these artworks—particularly two of them, *Home is My Heart* and *Good Days*, both produced in 2017—exceed that seemingly exclusively women-only focus in many respects. These works impart an expansive politics of feminism committed to questions of gender and sexuality but also to care, justice, and ethics more broadly. In this way, the banners fulfill the feminist vision Sara Ahmed has outlined:

Living a feminist life does not mean adopting a set of ideals or norms of conduct, although it might mean asking ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world; ... how to create relationships with others that are more equal; how to find ways to support those who are not supported or are less supported by social systems (Ahmed 2017, 1).

The banners are significant instances where the artist and her co-makers make entangled inequalities widely inflicted on diaspora communities markedly visible. Terkol's family, too, once were members of a diasporic community; they came to Turkey in the 1950s as a part of a Turkic movement from Manchuria (modern-day Northeast China). Their multifarious experiences of migration have had an intergenerational impact on Terkol's subject position and the formation of her artistic identity (Örer 2020). Despite her background in painting, for example, Terkol has examined the material and symbolic possibilities that fabrics offer to explore modes of transition and care in her work. While considering transition as both a form of mobility and a continuous transformation of subjectivities and identities, with regard to care the artist has cultivated a sensory approach; as she has noted:

The fabric which I love to use in recent years is made of cotton and transparent material. It is used to function as a protective shade for plants as well as to heal people's wounds. I transform the white fabric used as greenhouse fabric, gauze or shade by coloring it myself. [...] The material reminds me of the second skin. Although it is fragile, it has the power to carry my stories (Terkol cited in Ünay 2021).

As for her investigations into the processes of artmaking, they accordingly led her to an "anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-classist" aesthetics distinctly defined by creating in togetherness (Ünay 2021). Importantly, Terkol's workshops regularly often become intimate environments, where participants open up to each other, discussing personal stories and matters of everyday life. In fact, the co-producers of *Good Days* embraced the empathetic energy in the room so much so they often burst into song (Terkol cited in Baban and Rygiel 2018, 92–93). As Veronika Zink writes, unsettling the "pre-established rules, hegemonic norms, and imposed structures" of conventional social forms, "affective communities" value the sensory infrastructures and exchanges of social encounters that form and transform the social (Zink 2019). These communities therefore offer endless possibilities of being together and becoming through the emotive and political modes of conversation and encounters. Assuming a non-hierarchical position within this affectively organized community, Terkol thus facilitates the fostering of creative agency. This means more than providing representation or giving voice as the artist does not speak *for* this

community but she speaks *with* them while they acquire the role of co-maker. Therefore, in each group work, co-makers take over the creation of the speech bubbles and develop ideas about the project.

As Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge have observed, diasporic communities are constructed through disparate historical experiences and narratives and are a product of diverse circumstances and particular encounters in different local and global contexts (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1989). Therefore, the identity of diasporic communities and subjects is not pre-given and refuses fixity. Terkol's co-makers in *Home is My Heart* (2017), who were residents at the Middlesex Street Estate, which was built in the mid-1960s in a historically commercial district of central London, manifested such a diasporic community. While creating together, each co-maker harnessed their own relationship with other cultures, contributing fabrics to the work from places such as Brazil, Italy, and Turkey. But also, several pieces that formed the banner were collected from the West African fabric stores surrounding the Estate, as well as the Pakistani and Indian boutiques spread across London (Terkol cited in Yayla 2022). The unique cultural and material qualities of these fabrics have therefore been sealed into the banner, which in turn, helped embody London in relation to its many diaspora spaces. During the workshops, co-makers speak together on their connections with others, localities, and communities in addition to voicing concerns about the rising housing crisis in London. Providing homes for the working classes, council estates were once celebrated as a progressive component of Britain's enduring social housing policy. However, since the 1970s, state-subsidized housing has seen a steady decline much owing to regeneration projects and social cleansing, which forced many residents who belonged to a social category that was deemed undesirable out of their homes (Lees and Hubbard 2021). Although at the same time, communities of color gained gradual access to social housing, they have been disproportionately impacted by the emerging nationwide policy of demolition of council estates (Lees and Hubbard 2021, 347–348). As one of a few council estates remaining in central London, the Middlesex Street Estate hosts an ethnically and racially diverse community that resists being displaced by state-led gentrification. Their banner thus mirrors this mixed urban picture, where a playful city landscape in all its complexity collides with precarious lives. Denoting the intersecting histories of class, race, and inequalities of property the banner thus assembles transnational political selves who optimistically partake in this creative labor to make something together, while they are being dispossessed of social and local fields that bring them together equitably.

There are several instances in which some diasporic communities—particularly the most notable diaspora communities of today—such as those of Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan, and Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers (most of whom are people of color)—confront various forms of discrimination everywhere. It is now well established that, in light of the rising numbers of displaced people worldwide, negative attitudes and sentiments toward migrants, refugees, and “foreign-born” people have increasingly been widespread in the past few decades.² For example, a population of nearly 3.8 million Syrians are recorded to be living in Turkey.³ Some of them have found refuge owing to their long-standing cultural and religious ties in southeast Turkey (Kaya 2017). But many others have become the target of aggression and attacks. As a result of unjust border politics and “selective humanitarianism” (Korkut 2016) in addition to the ethnic-nationalist, populist political discourses, these communities are often seen as a threat (Özden 2013).

In *Good Days* (Figure 20.2), which is the other collective banner produced in 2017, Terkol and her co-makers push back on anti-foreigner sentiments while rendering some of these intense engagements vividly conspicuous. Terkol's co-producers for this banner were eleven women from the Syrian diasporic community and four women from Turkey who had migrated to Istanbul from other cities. Some of the embroidered images on the banner, which has taken the shape of a winged figure, convey the co-makers' sentiments for



FIGURE 20.2 Güneş Terkol, *Good Days*, sewing on fabric, fifteen pieces, 2017 (115 × 199 centimeters), Istanbul. Co-makers: Halud Eşram, Abir Elhaddad, Huda Altozary, Amira Almohammad, Sabah Şeyhoğlu, Ghalya Bakhsh, Seham Abo Shhab, Hevin Hamas'i, Eman Almasrı, Mezgin Maho, Kelsum Reşid, Meryem Tomak, Gayem Bayır, Latife Hamdaş, and Manar Kırayem. Courtesy of Güneş Terkol.

borders and memories of migration, reproducing the multiplicity of their diaspora experiences. Some others condemn war and violence in Syria and disavow discrimination against Syrian communities. The banner thus materializes the various narratives of transnational subjectivities and communities who routinely face discrimination, inequality, and injustice. Yet, the arcadian vistas that were also depicted on the banner hint at the proposition that diasporas can be viewed as sites for new beginnings, alliances, and resistances—as in Yalter's, Kılınçaslan's, and Doğan's projects. Cultivating micro-communities of affect in different ways, where the nurturing of cooperation, and emotive, reparative connections often transpire, these aesthetic works and acts align with the disparate, unfixed, and transformative constitutions of diaspora spaces and communities. Together with their distinctive artmaking processes and collective strength, they decisively evoke a critical optimism, while building feminist and affective solidarities across borders.

Notes

- 1 Nil Yalter, Personal interview with the author, March 23, 2016.
- 2 Recent notable cases range from the demolition of refugee camps on the island of Chios in Greece (2020) and in Calais, France (2016) to the divisive Brexit vote in 2016 and the efforts to strengthen the barrier on the border between Mexico and the United States (2017–2020).
- 3 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that there are 6.8 million Syrian refugees worldwide; while some are being resettled, some others are still on the move or in camps. See: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>, accessed July 13, 2022.

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GENDER/SEXUALITY

Performing the Intersection: Camp and the “Cat Lady”

Jane Chin Davidson

The exploration of identity in relation to contemporary art has grown exponentially since the latter half of the twentieth century, due to complex global shifts such as decolonial movements around the world, the rise of identity politics in the aftermath of the US Civil Rights movement, and the current practice of artists expressing culturally diverse global subjectivities. The performance medium has been influential, especially body-oriented art, for its capacity for performing identity through the staging of the body as the intersectional expression of visible cues of gender, sexuality, race, and disability. However, the *camp* form of performance in the United States has arguably been around for a long time, for example, in the 1920s hyper-feminine figure popularized by Hollywood film star Mae West (see Hamilton 1997).¹ Acknowledging this camp history, I am reminded that identification is something that is practiced everyday by everyone and the tendency to interpret others by their visible appearance and modes of embodiment makes the visual arts (including performance art) advantageous for critique—visuality lends itself to the critical exploration of how identification occurs. As a way of understanding this tendency, I explore here a particular example of this artistic critique of the norm of mainstream vision (heteronormative, white- and male-dominant vision) and thereby expose the structures through which we determine identity. Modes of identification—such as race and gender—are intersectional, inseparable, and complex. For this reason, performance, which activates live bodies in space (the artist and their audience members together) can offer a more charged field in which intersectional embodiments take place in relation to each other.

Even in the global framework for contemporary art, identity politics pertain to a body or a community in a cultural location; they are always specific to a time and place and situated in a national context. Not only are embodiment and identity experienced differently from body to body, culture to culture; even on the stage of social and legal relations, gender, sexuality, race, relative ability, and other modes of identity are also always subjected to governmental regulation. Political and social trends set the stage. In the United States, for example, the politics of gender have shifted in the advent of *Dobbs v. Jackson*, a 2022 ruling of the Supreme Court overturning the constitutional right to abortion (which had been

secured by the 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*). The legislation has mitigated the sense of feminist progress, not only regarding the reproductive rights of women but also in relation to other impending rights issues such as those pertaining to same-sex and interracial marriage as well as transgender rights. Of course, this backward regression emerged with the 2016 election of Donald Trump, which marked the culmination of a backlash precipitated by the right wing with the success of Barak Obama, the first Black US president (2009–2017)—a backlash that is starting to feel like revenge.² Some have characterized Trump as a camp figure, premised on Susan Sontag’s definition for a person with a recognizably parodic and grotesque personality (Sontag 1964). But in the aftermath of his presidency, no one is laughing.

Instead, the right-wing intensity of gender-sex-race discrimination during and now beyond Trump’s tenure as president has placed women and LGBTQ people, and essentially all people of color, at risk in dramatic ways. For example, following the 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who was filmed kneeling on Mr. Floyd’s neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds until he suffocated to death, massive protests ensued across and beyond the United States. In response, Trump’s administration cracked down on the newly invigorated surge of Black Lives Matter marches, culminating in the militarized dispersal of protesters by teargas at Lafayette Square in Washington DC, for a presidential photo-op at St. John’s Church. The legitimization of racism and sexism was the hallmark of the Trump administration, with every kind of hate speech sanctified by the president of the United States—including explicit anti-Asian comments about the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. While Trump’s racism, long established previously in his redlining real estate tactics and “leadership” during highly racist cultural moments (such as the surge of unfounded accusations toward the Central Park Five in 1989; and the persecution of Obama himself as being a “non-citizen” of the United States by the “birther” movement, starting in 2011), had been less in evidence when he was elected, his misogyny has long been legendary. He was elected after his infamous remark—“grab them [women] by the pussy”—which had been taped in 2005 by *Access Hollywood* was exposed in the *Washington Post* (Fahrenthold 2016).³ Summarized by journalist Jill Filipovic, the president’s “sexism moves in two directions: Women who are young, slim, white and conventionally attractive are sex objects, while women who don’t fit his narrow ideal of femininity are dismissed as pigs and dogs. Either way, there’s one status no woman seems to achieve: Human being” (Filipovic 2017). This kind of disrespect was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted, Trump blamed all Chinese people by calling COVID-19 the “Kung-Flu” and the “China Virus,” which incited more than 11,400 Asian hate crimes in the United States between March 2020 and March 2022, an increase of 339% over previous years. Among the acts of violence was the murder of six Asian women in 2021 by a white male shooter in Atlanta who blamed his sex addiction on the women he fetishized (Rios 2022; also see Yong 2021).

In 2023, these uniquely regressive political circumstances in the United States epitomized by the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and the Atlanta killings motivated me to revisit the essay, “Performative Laughter, Camp and the Cat Lady,” that I published in 2015, the year before Trump was elected, in the British feminist art journal *n.paradoxa*. The way in which sexism and racism were so openly intertwined through Trump’s actions and statements over and beyond his four-year presidency has substantiated a discriminatory *intersectional* mode of hate speech. Rather than silencing us, this can galvanize deeper thinking on how to understand identity in relation to the visual arts, including performance art.

When I originally wrote this chapter, I wanted to conduct a specific analysis that addressed the conflicts I hardly ever read about in relation to the sexual stereotyping of Asian women in the visual field. As a researcher of contemporary art and exhibitions, my own readings in feminist visual studies never quite spoke to these issues, and the takeaway is that the analysis of how gender and sexuality work in relation to contemporary art cannot continue to

support universal claims as dominant modes of feminism once did through the singularly defined “woman” in the mainstream women’s movement. In other words, any analysis of sex/gender in relation to the visual arts must begin from the understanding that all identity is specific and is articulated and experienced as simultaneously raced, spiritually based, on a spectrum in relation to able-bodiedness, sexed/gendered, classed, and so on. To make this point, I would assert that we need more contributions from wide-ranging cultural perspectives analyzing a range of identities in contemporary art. To that end, this chapter serves as a case study for addressing this specificity, newly reframed here in relation to the current politicization of identity in and beyond the United States.

Performative Laughter

Camp theater is known for representing the queer subject surreptitiously through comedic surrogates and doubles. In the ensemble piece *Cat Lady*, which opened in 2011 at Houston’s Diverseworks, playwright-performer Kristina Wong reveals the way in which the camp *substitute* is a poignant metaphor as much as it is a laughable rejoinder. A “cat lady” is often code for the female spinster as much as it is for the figure of the lesbian. Wong features herself in this central role alongside the character Oliver the cat, her significant other played by the cross-dressing drag-performer Barbie-Q. The ribald vignette is based loosely on Wong’s real-life inability to meet and keep a male love interest because she is always on the road performing. Bedlam becomes an emotional landscape for Oliver’s jealous ambivalence as the pussy constantly “sprays” the Cat Lady (with a spray bottle) to punish her for her absences, all the while purring “pet my magic fur and never feel alone” (Figure 21.1). If the figure of the lonely spinster signifies failure in fulfilling the heteronormative order for dating, marriage, and partnership, then Oliver (All-of-her) is Cat Lady’s reassuring alter ego and “petting the fur” articulates the autoerotic act that also connotes lesbian desire.

Wong’s fast-paced delivery of jokes elicits nervous laughter from its audience. Here, she draws on the full emotional effect of humor as called for on the Brechtian stage, acknowledging the influences of twentieth-century political theater. While *drag* has recently become more mainstream through social media platforms and major television shows like *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and *Pose*, in the past drag/camp was always fringe, illegitimate theater, reflexive of an underground subculture that sought to reveal the political through the sexual. The



FIGURE 21.1 Kristina Wong as the Cat Lady and Barbie-Q as Oliver in the play *Cat Lady*, 2011, Diverseworks, Houston, screenshot of performance document. Courtesy of Kristina Wong.

development of feminist performance art is often traced to similar roots: queer feminist artists since the 1970s, including Holly Hughes, Split Britches, the Waitresses, Diane Torr, and Annie Sprinkle, have used humor strategically to expose the sexual typecast. Their work represents a key strand of feminist performance that connects to the recent, specifically Latina comic edge in the performance works of artists like Nao Bustamente and Xandra Ibarra. In addition, Wong extends from a generation of Asian-American artists—including Margaret Cho, Nikki S. Lee, and Patty Chang—who have contributed to a comedic performative practice for addressing sexual stereotypes as inextricable from racial stereotypes.

As an element of performance, I explore the ways in which Wong's vocabulary of camp signifiers evolved from feminist and queer tactics in a development that implicates the viewer through laughter. The active engagement of laughing connects the body of the laughter to the body of the performer onstage, which is an important political function of performance. The body-oriented expression exposes the viewers' biases for interpreting difference, such as the fetish-conventions of fear toward the Black male body in contrast to desire toward the "exotic" Asian female body (see Jones 1998, 11).

Wong's multimedia theatrical drama also reprises a particular form of parodic minstrelsy that served the exigencies of the Civil Rights era and the Vietnam War. The 1960s San Francisco-based group called the Mime Troupe was an example of what theater critic Arthur Sainer calls the "West coast radical movement," a group whose style of *commedia dell'arte* (Italian popular and bawdy comedy) accommodated original plays such as *Minstrel Show or Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel* as well as elements from classic European plays such as Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) (Sainer 1997, 21). The point was to co-opt and problematize the minstrel form from the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century US that presented blackface and yellowface as a derisive expression. Sainer defines the 1960s revue as an open stage for dealing with racial issues, one that Wong expands on by including the audience in the farcical exchange. In her reconceptualization, Wong creates a "show within the show" centered on Johnny Wolf, the Korean-American "pick-up" artist who actually runs a real-life course on teaching men how to sexually conquer Asian women.⁴ Wong had secretly videotaped her visit to Wolf's club in Los Angeles and video interludes of his seminar are interspersed throughout the live performance of *Cat Lady*. In one of his video clips titled "How to hook up with Asian girls," Wolf asks his male students about their preferences:

Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and then the more exotic types, Thai, Hmong—how many of you have heard of Hmong—spelled H-m-o-n-g—what am I forgetting, Filipino, Vietnamese, Hawaiian? ... Asian girls are sweet, have soft skin, they are petite—tiny, they are faithful, they cook and clean for you, they don't talk back, they're clingy sometimes, and they treat you like a real man.⁵

While laughing at the video interlude, one could not help but be disturbed by the idea that Johnny Wolf was really teaching a group of men how to actively hunt for Asian women because they exemplify these "feminine" qualities. The Asian female fetish has often been considered as the substitute woman for de-masculinized men—closeted gays—since "passive" Asian females are considered as less of a threat to masculinity in the heterosexual order (see Azhar, Alvarez, Farina, and Klumpner 2021). As the counterpart of this dynamic, Asian men are stereotyped as effeminate. This disparity explains why the online dating website *Asiandate.com* was in 2015 still dedicated to men looking for Asian women and was not available for women looking for Asian men (this has changed and, indeed, in 2023, women seeking an Asian man can apply, although the photograph on the webpage promotes a white male and an Asian female couple).⁶ Behind Wolf's exotic roll call of Asian women is the intersectional racism/misogyny in the US public sphere, where Asian women are so often treated as sexual objects.

Such stereotypes are not just about the realm of representation. Writing in 2021 about the Atlanta shooter, journalist Sable Yong thus argues that the pattern of violence had long become internalized by the American mainstream through popular movies:

Asian women, already exoticized as presumed prostitutes were further fetishized in cinema and theater as exotic temptresses. *Full Metal Jacket* made “me love you long time” an iconic sneer to refer to Asian women as subservient sexual conquests for white men. The musical *Miss Saigon* tells a romance of an American GI falling in love with a docile and compliant Vietnamese woman (Yong 2021).

Yong points to the erotic turn-on of the passive and subservient Asian female in American culture; a projection of sexual fantasies for the powerful white soldiers, the stereotype dehumanizes Asian women to the degree that the Atlanta killer set out to eliminate the temptations, as many as he could. But overall, Wolf’s overt fetishization of the Asian female appears as a nostalgic projection of a time gone by—a revival of the tradition of male-dominated females, a reverie of passive women subservient to male needs. It is a projection of the hyper-heteronormative male gaze in a time when those traditions are increasingly diminished in the greater social sphere.

Still, Johnny Wolf promises his techniques will enable his pick-up artists to get plenty of, in his words, “Asian pussy.” Returning to the live performance, Wong transfers Wolf’s pussy fetish to her own cat fetish: “short hair, long hair, calico, tabby, delicious orange tabby, sphinx, how many heard of a sphinx, s-p-h-i-n-x ... what am I forgetting, Persian, Siamese...nice... Burmese. I think I’ll own every one of them,” says Cat Lady. A barrage of stuffed toy cats litter the stage (Figure 21.2); meanwhile Oliver, in his animated role as the fetish, comes back to dominate the scene by using a super soaker to drench the Cat Lady, shouting “you get so wrapped up in your shows you forget I exist!” In turn, Cat Lady exclaims “Johnny Wolf you are a liar, I tried to control the pussy but it went through an existential crisis!” Clearly, Oliver’s hysterics rule over the “game,” revealing a kind of substitute fetish that speaks back to the fetishizer (standing in for Wong as an Asian woman speaking back to her fetishizer Johnny Wolf). The pussy disrupts the symbolic order of the heterosexual male fixation. This was made clear in another scene, when Oliver directs a bootcamp for student pick-up artists, enlisted in a drill to use a “pick-up line” while cruising for girls in a bar. The student pick-up artists fail at creating good opening seductions in a timely manner. The heterosexual male seduction



FIGURE 21.2 Kristina Wong, returning to the live performance, Wong transfers Wolf’s pussy fetish to her own cat fetish, in the play *Cat Lady*, 2011, Diverseworks, Houston, screenshot of performance document. Courtesy of Kristina Wong.

game, predicated on Johnny Wolf's seminar "How to Tame the Pussy," is rewritten by Wong as her theatrical drama reverses the power relation by depicting the opposite, a segment in that could be called "The Pussy Tames the Pick-Up Artist."

In Wong's camp-fetish vocabulary, the pussy (cunt) is animated by an actual character role, which is completely plausible in the comedic genre. Oliver's predecessor in drag performance can be seen in the character of Lady Dick, playwright Holly Hughes's creation of the lesbian detective Garnet McClit. Hughes's 1986 play *The Lady Dick* reconfigures the femme fatale character by playing her as a neologism: lady/dick. The writing of gender performance can be understood as the embodiment of the spoken double entendre (which actually hails from the longstanding camp legacy made popular by Mae West, as noted earlier). Within this legacy, Wong's figure of the Pussy correlates to Hughes's Lady Dick, whose bawdy and sinister anti-hero delivers these lines to music:

A butch is a woman
Who looks like a man
Depending how close you look.
A femme is a female
Sometimes she may be male
Sometimes she don't want to cook.
A femme can be fatal
A butch be prenatal
But everyone knows a dick (Quoted in Davy 2010, 142).

Described by critic C. Carr as dyke noir, Hughes's live theater of drag kings aimed to disturb the hetero conventions of narrative cinema and the mythical power of the male gaze (Davy 2010, 141). This particular kind of queer feminist performance art in the 1980s asserted the actual body of the live performer in contravention of the film fantasy. But in present-day performances, the female embodiment of male characters is meant to subvert the "institution of gender" in the aftermath of Judith Butler's analysis of gender performance (see Butler 1990). For instance, Diane Torr's character Angus McTavish, who participated in the 2007 pissing contest, a homage to Nam June Paik's Fluxus Champion Contest at the James Cohan Gallery, demonstrates the performative gesture that stands in for manhood—Torr's ability to stand and piss in a urinal while singing the national anthem is genuinely laughable but in truth signifies a body that cannot be anatomically secured as "male," as securing masculine authority and power (see Torr and Bottoms 2010, xii). As Stephen Bottoms inquires, "what distinguishes 'maleness'? In the eyes of most, it is probably still the penis—which females supposedly 'lack'—and yet men do not go around flashing their members to legitimize their privileged status in the world. They rely on performative metonyms for their manhood" (Torr and Bottoms 2010, 4; also see Volcano and Halberstam 1999). Drag kings show how these gestures and bodily affects can be appropriated by women for an expression of power. However, artists have also shown how the performance of the "raced" male body cannot express the same power as Torr's white male figure of authority.

The Mythic Being of the Stereotype

Wong's pussy Oliver is really a substitute for the substitute, a fantasy object configured as an alternative to the self to envision a kind of freedom from the stereotype of the sexually exotic, subservient Asian female. As a cat, Oliver personifies the alter ego much in the way that Jean-Paul Sartre articulates the ontology of a person who "frees himself from himself by the very act by which he makes himself an object for himself" (Sartre 1984, 109). But

drag has the same goal, as Adrian Piper notes in citing Sartre in her “Notes on the Mythic Being,” the essay explaining her iconic 1973 drag performances as a mustached Black man in an Afro wig, “dressing in the guise of the Mythic Being and appearing publicly [on the street] several times during the month” (Piper 1999, 117). Her stated aim, to create an “object of meditation for me,” exemplifies Sartre’s phenomenology of self-objectification. Modeled from “alcoholics, panhandlers, freaks, crazies,” Piper goes on to explain how her “behavior changes. I swagger, stride, lope, lower my eyebrows, raise my shoulders, sit with my legs wide apart on the subway, so as to accommodate my protruding genitalia” (Piper 1999, 117). Piper describes the gestures and bodily affect of “being a man.” But unlike the way in which Torr’s double McTavish was empowered by the male stance in the pissing match, Piper’s drag performance is arguably not an act that elicits self-empowerment. Her statement “I embody everything you most hate and fear,” included in the color-embellished photograph of herself as the Mythic Being, reveals how Piper’s racialized drag exposes the gaze toward the Black male body.⁷ The racial stereotype, inducing the viewer’s hate and fear, therefore overshadows and forecloses the performative metonym that Bottoms describes as manhood and masculine authority.

Still, Piper’s caricature incites an anxious humor, which the artist builds upon by creating an accompanying comic series in the guise of an advertising campaign for the *Village Voice* newspaper. She uses the cartoon thought bubbles to convey different messages in her comic series, the same format that she adopted for her statement, by which, “I embody everything you most hate and fear” is to be read as a mass-media message of popular culture repetition. The scene of the terrifying stereotype for the Black male is made less terrifying through the comic tableau as much as Piper’s drag king is an obvious caricature serving as the punchline. In Frantz Fanon’s analysis, blackness in the European context is a constant caricaturing of “tom-toms, cannibalism ... above all: ‘Sho’ good eatin’” (Fanon 1968, 112). And, according to Homi K. Bhabha, minstrel blackface can be defined as mimicry: “If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce ... this comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies” for knowledge about race (Bhabha 1994, 85). Mimicry can function as a humorous mask, creating an encounter in which laughter works to assert the disavowal of difference, offering a form of control over the anxiety caused by the racial body. It works brilliantly in the ambivalent process through which fear and desire ultimately ensure the continuation of the stereotype through its vague and unverifiable assertions. As Bhabha suggests:

the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the sexual license of the African that needs no proof can never, really, in discourse be proved ... for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. Yet the function of ambivalence as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power—whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan—remains to be charted (Bhabha 1994, 85).

The stereotype guarantees the racist repetition in the collective unconscious, which explains why, in spite of years of public protests across the United States, police violence against Black people continues. The maleness and blackness of the Mythic Being elicits the “hate and fear” elicited by every Black male body in Euro-American culture, even a seventeen-year-old Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, who in February 2012 was shot and killed by a watch volunteer in his own neighborhood while on his walk back from a convenience store. Martin’s death was a watershed moment for African-American activism. In 2013, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi established Black Lives Matter and their public outreach was effective as people marched and gave support across the country. Obama, who was president at the time, responded by saying, “if I had a son, he would look like Trayvon” (see Hajela 2022). Unfortunately, the list of high-profile murders of Black

people, mostly men, continued, for example, with the 2014 deaths of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson and forty-three-year-old Eric Garner in New York, both at the hands of the police; the murder of Ahmaud Arbery while he was out on a run in his own Georgia neighborhood in 2020 by three white male vigilantes; and many others. But when the country bore eyewitness to the execution of George Floyd by the police, there was a palpable sense of recognition of the conditions of racism toward Black males across the spectrum of the American public.

While Piper's 1973 cross-dressing project reveals the endurance of the pattern of hostility being expressed specifically toward Black men, the Asian male body within the same heteronormative, white-dominant order is perceived in terms that are nearly the opposite of those connected to the Black hypermasculine threat. For example, when comedian Margaret Cho presented herself in the role of a North Korean general as a parody of the late dictator Kim Jong-il, she appears unconvincingly "male" with her red lipstick in male drag for the television role (Figure 21.3). But Cho's version of a "mythic being" produced anxiety-ridden laughter over the strange and the freakish nature of her parody rather than out of a perceived threat and/or a sense of fear. Her portrayal appeared to be non-sexual, resulting from the stereotype of the Asian male body as much as from this specific body's role as a signifier of the surreal politics of North Korea.

The Korean dictator is hardly a disempowered political figure; but in the context of Asian masculinity in the United States, Asian males are largely perceived as feminized, or "racially castrated" according to David Eng (2001). Chinese men with their long queues in the nineteenth century were the first Asians to be stereotyped as either effeminate or homosexual menaces. Richard Fung asserts that "Asian and anus are conflated," under the idea that queer demasculinization is viewed by white dominant culture as the disempowerment and castration of the Asian male (Fung 1991). Daniel Kim challenges this assertion when he accuses writers like Frank Chin of using "the terms 'feminine' and 'homosexual' as misogynistic and homophobic epithets to condemn the men who, they believe, embrace the hierarchical, stereotypical roles that white racism assigns to them. Women and gay men consequently bear the collateral damage of this strategy" (Kim 1998, 272). Although the mythic figure of the "Oriental" in US culture can never fulfill the heteronormative male role as it is normatively aligned with white masculinity, as shown by Cho's dubious Kim



FIGURE 21.3 Tina Fey, Margaret Cho, and Amy Poehler during the seventy-second annual Golden Globe Awards. Screenshot of video in public domain.

Jong-il, Daniel Kim is suggesting that both feminine and queer suffer derision and gay-bashing in the Asian-American critique.

Bhabha concludes that the stereotype is a substitute for the actual experience, the lived subjectivity, of the person whose gender or appearance as a person of color is being fetishized, whether terrifying Black male or minstrel mimicry, whether castrated Asian male or objectified as Orientalist sexual exotica. In this way, the mythic persona expresses an existential absence in contrast to the fully present white male (as noted by Fanon 1968, 110), an ontological state that every person of color understands on a subjective level, explaining why Piper staged her exploration as a self-meditation/mediation. But when the performer who is identified by race and gender deliberately makes herself the subject and object of the audience's gaze, she is disturbing the conventional power relation. The performer's creation of the role is a challenge to the stereotype because she changes the heteronormative dynamics of the mastery of "looking at" and the subservient state of "being looked at."

Cho uses this strategy in her stand-up routines by adopting a rhetorical approach to her onstage character. For decades, she has challenged the sexual and racial Asian stereotype by making herself the focus of bombastic jokes, usually by pointing to her "real" body as the object of an always-already condition of racial masquerade—a concept that applies as well to Kristina Wong's unembellished racialized performance as the Cat Lady. Cho's 1999 performance *I'm the One That I Want*, released as a concert film in 2000, and her memoir, written under the same title in 2002, clarify the objectives for making herself an "object for herself," under Sartre's analysis.

The approach taken by Piper and Cho marked a significant shift from the feminist critique of the male gaze in mainstream film, attributed to Laura Mulvey's influential feminist psychoanalytical argument in her 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Mulvey 1975). In Mulvey's analysis, the dominant viewpoint of every film is from the subject position of the male protagonist, while women are always passive objects of desire in the story; they are objects strictly to-be-looked-at by both the male in the narrative and the male viewer in the theater. For instance, through their male gaze, the male audiences of the films *Full Metal Jacket* and *Miss Saigon*, cited by Yong, can identify as active subjects just like the movie's protagonists, while the female characters are there just for their sexual pleasure; heterosexual women viewers presumably align with this state of objectification. And as revealed by the Atlanta killings, those dynamics remain entrenched in the mainstream public sphere, with the specific male fetishization in this case functioning to objectify and dominate Asian women.

When bell hooks wrote her important 1992 essay on the "oppositional gaze," she invoked the Black female spectators of film, exposing the totalizing discourse of white spectatorship, another layer of domination in the power relations of film. Developing this critique further, Amelia Jones describes the tendency by feminists to eventually fetishize the gaze theory itself (Jones 2012, 63–116). In rejection of Mulvey's white male gaze, hooks's oppositional gaze was a call for resistance to implement what Piper and Cho describe as "making herself an 'object for herself'" and not for anyone else. Much in the same way that Wong creates an autoerotic object of the pussy, Cho's spoken title *I'm the One That I Want* articulates a desire for the self, one who is lost to the stereotype's production of an existential absence. To Cho, the joke is always a spoken truth, and her monologues serve to elucidate the missing subjectivity of Asian women due to the stereotype. The Hollywood typecast provides a clear example since the roles offered to Cho are always diminutive parts, never the protagonist. She writes hilariously about the blatant characterization in a long monologue in which only a brief part is copied here:

I have never had any desire to play a maid, a liquor store owner kicking a black person out of my store ... a worldly-wise acupuncturist, an early-rising, loose black cotton pants-wearing elderly woman practicing tai chi in the park, a manicurist, a prostitute, a student in an English as a Second Language course, a purveyor of exotic mushrooms and ginseng...

woman balancing a basket of any kind on my head, being the second wife and committing suicide to avenge the first wife by coming back as a ghost and scaring the shit out of everyone, or, alternately, committing suicide because my white lover did not come back to Japan after the war, or having him come back for me and fooling him successfully for years and years into thinking I am a woman when really I'm a dude, as if my race castrates me so much that this deception is completely feasible ... In short, don't call me about your script. I know it's going to be one of those parts ... All these characters are not who I am. They don't speak for me. They don't speak for all Asian Americans (Cho 2007, 44–46).

Rather than fill the typecast characters offered to her by mainstream film and television, Cho parodies the sex-race-exotica Asian role in her live comedic portrayals through her stand-up and burlesque shows such as *The Sensuous Woman* presented in New York in 2007. In this show, Cho included other performers such as the belly dancer Princess Farhana, the transgendered comic Ian Harvie, and Kurt Hall of the Gay Mafia Comedy Troupe. Described as “Cirque du Salacious ... celebrating the variables and vicissitudes of gay men and lesbian women in all their transparent and transitional glory,” Cho celebrates an infinite variety of naked “real” bodies on stage in a bawdy revue created for a predominantly queer audience (see Hetrick 2007; Saltzman 2007).

Always autobiographical, Cho's stand-up material includes jokes about her lifelong role as a “fag-hag,” described as the “marriage of two derogatory terms, *fag* and *hag* [as] symbolizing the union of the world's most popular objects of scorn, *homosexual* and *woman*” (Cho 2001, 37). In this way, Cho is in agreement with Kim's refusal to consider “Asian as anus” as a bad thing. She asserts that the fag-hag moniker is not offensive but one of solidarity as she recounts her experience growing up in San Francisco among drag queens and gay neighbors (Cho 2001, 37). Since the age of twelve, Cho was bullied for being a fat Korean girl, especially by the children at Sunday School who targeted her Korean name, Moran Cho (which means peony flower). Moreover, the leering men who were the adults in her life were always a threat, and when she finally understood that she was “surrounded by homosexual men the first thing I felt was *safe*. I felt calm, and protected and thrilled at the voyeuristic possibilities all the time” (Cho 2001, 37). Of course, her sense of humor was developing as well: “those leather-chap guys hiding in doorways and alleys, often one standing against the wall and one kneeling down in front. I thought, ‘That is so nice. They are fixing each other's zippers’” (Cho 2001, 37). But the question raised by Cho's strategy for “othering” herself in a hyperbolically funny way is how this differs from her litany of Hollywood stereotypes—for instance, isn't the character from the Broadway show, *M. Butterfly*, whose drag persona fools the male protagonist “successfully for years and years into thinking I am a woman when really I'm a dude,” of the same “Cirque du Salacious” community?⁸

The answer lies in the camp form as one that has played a part in *ambivalence* in relation to institutionalized difference. Historically, camp contributed to the minstrel blackface and yellowface management of racial anxiety, which was constituted from the white, male heteronormative imaginary. As Moe Meyer argues, the “quality of humor that has been traditionally attributed to Camp is part of a larger heterocentrist strategy for defusing and discounting homosexuality by seeing it as merely too comic, too laughable, or ‘just a joke’” (Meyer 2010, 40). As exemplified by Cho and Wong, camp currently conveys the opposite in greater public ways, although it was always potentially co-opted against minstrel forms as well as by the queer community. In parallel with the changing social mores, Meyer argues that camp has been around for so long that its earlier shameful status denotes a type of self-hating kitsch (as exemplified by Mae West) and was denounced by both gay and feminist critics alike. Meyer suggests that Susan Sontag's 1964 “Notes on Camp” had “complicated the interpretations by detaching the signifying codes from their gay signified” (Meyer 2010, 40). In order to claim “gay access to the apparatus of representation,” he reasserts the “gay” in camp as the sole defining distinction of camp (Meyer 2010, 41).

But artists such as Piper and Cho have used camp masquerade as an intersecting concept with racial ambivalence, simply because they cannot divest of the racial costume in the same way they can their sexual drag. As Carole-Anne Tyler explains, “the controversy over the meaning of camp reveals as much about the fears and desires of theorists of drag as it does about the fears and desires of impersonators themselves” (Tyler 1991, 33). The line is thin between fulfilling the racial/sexual stereotype and creating an object that exposes the stereotype, the dilemma that Cho must confront as a Hollywood actor who rejects the typecast versions of the Asian woman. As Tyler suggests, “revalued or devalued, camp and its interpretations participate in the reproduction of subjectivity and can be defensive as well as counter-offensive” (Tyler 1991, 33).

The Final Scene of the Heteronormative Patriarchal Order

Wong’s parody of Johnny Wolf through *Cat Lady* appears to fulfill Tyler’s overall diagnosis: “Curiously, this theorizing of camp seems camp itself, like a parody of parody (of gender play as subversion). Who is putting on whom—or what—here?” (Tyler 1991, 33). Wong’s use of ambivalence can be viewed as rewriting the heteronormative patriarchal order in relation to power and the symbolic. Contradiction is central to the camp concepts of *Cat Lady*, manifested by the sense of truth we all feel about cats in general, putting into question why a “spinster” would adopt such a companion like Oliver, who is both demanding and needy. Cat Lady’s fetish, in the end, expresses the ambivalent figure of substitution since Oliver both supports and resists the Cat Lady’s female agency and feminine desire.

The logic can be explained by Wong’s representation of the hyperfeminine in which woman is an autoerotic character in the collapse of distinctions between her “self” and her object of desire. The lesbian transformation of the structure of desiring subject and object comprises the new dynamics of the primal scene. In this way, the “pussy” represents a symbol of power rather than an “inferior” organ (based on masculinist models of Freudian psychoanalysis) as Oliver offers a completely different perspective toward “lack.” Wong shows how the fetish can still expose the displacement of human value by emphasizing the way that objectification through the fetish causes the real “lack” of women’s self-worth. (Wong’s other performance works such as *Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, filmed in 2013, undertake an exploration of the self-loathing of Asian-American women who are statistically prone to depression and suicide.) The problem of maintaining heterosexual ideals relates to the development of false identifications through the fetish, which continue to be the cause of “worthlessness” as a human condition. Although the repressive society of Freud’s era is not exactly the society in which we live, the values of heteronormative patriarchy have not changed much in terms of the ideals for dating, marriage, and family.

In the final act of *Cat Lady*, Kristina Wong appears in character as herself in a videotaped interview with Johnny Wolf. At one point in the interview, they discover that they grew up in close proximity, both attending nearby high schools in Los Angeles. Wong reminisces, “I always wanted someone to pick me up, I was so lonely. I was always seeking the company of imaginary people.” Wolf starts to brag about the peak of his pick-up career whereupon the apex of his pick-up success could be marked by a sexual threesome with two “girls.” But Johnny admits that twenty minutes after the encounter when the girls left his house, he also felt very lonely. In a “reality tv show” moment, he tells Kristina Wong that he has retired from being a pick-up artist. In the end, *Cat Lady* shows the ongoing social imperative for fulfilling the heteronormative progression that begins with the conquest of dating, proceeding with marriage and fidelity, and finally settling down in a monogamous relationship and having children. Not achieving these ideals results in social failure and in *Cat Lady* the loss of self-worth is expressed by the signifier of loneliness for both the fetishizer and the fetishized. A life with *just a cat* as your partner denotes failure, and regardless of racial or

sexual preferences, the concept of “lack” is reducible to loneliness and absence in the heteronormative patriarchal order.

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Notes

- 1 “Is that a gun in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?” was memorialized in West’s final film *Sextette* (1977), but the line was delivered mostly offstage by the actor/playwright who broke barriers for sexual expression (her 1927 play *The Drag* caused the “outlawing of depictions of homosexuality on the New York stage” and her staging of the 1928 play *Sex* led to her arrest). As quoted in Roth Pierpont (1996, 108).
- 2 If I were writing during Obama’s tenure, I would have extolled the 2010 repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, permitting gays and lesbians to serve openly in the US Military and the US Supreme Court’s 2015 declaration via *Obergefell v. Hodges* that same-sex marriage is legal in all fifty states.
- 3 As summarized by reporter David Fahrenthold (2016): “Donald Trump bragged in vulgar terms about kissing, groping and trying to have sex with women during a 2005 conversation caught on a hot microphone, saying that ‘when you’re a star, they let you do it,’ according to a video obtained by *The Washington Post*. The video captures Trump talking with Billy Bush, then of ‘Access Hollywood,’ on a bus with the show’s name written across the side.”
- 4 Paraphrased as explained by Kristina Wong to the author in conversation, August 7, 2015.
- 5 This was spoken at the performance, which was recorded but not presented as a public video.
- 6 See <https://www.asiandate.com>, accessed on February 2, 2023.
- 7 The entire Mythic Being project includes black and white photographs, overdrawn with color, and documentary footage of the performance.
- 8 David Henry Hwang wrote the play *M. Butterfly* in 1986, expanding on a story from the same year: French diplomat Bernard Boursicot was convicted of espionage in France along with his lover Peking opera singer Shi Pei Pu, who masqueraded as a woman and obtained state documents from Boursicot as a spy for China. The play was made into a film of the same title by David Cronenberg in 1993.

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RACE/ETHNICITY

Three Forms of Appropriation: Carrie Mae Weems, Glenn Ligon, and Nao Bustamante

Jessi DiTillio and Cherise Smith

This chapter explores three types of appropriation and their uses by three artists of color. Scholar David Evans describes the “now pervasive” phenomenon of appropriation art as “based on the possession—usually unauthorized—of the images and artifacts of others” (Evans 2009, 12). This emphasis on possession is built into the etymology of appropriation, which suggests economic ownership—to *appropriate* is to dispossess someone of their property. Beyond this basic definition, what is appropriation art, and who defined its parameters as a movement? Artists of color have often been excluded from mainstream narratives of so-called “appropriation art,” despite the abundance of examples of appropriative tactics in their work. In the artworks discussed in this chapter, artists of color lay claim to earlier images and objects made by Euro-American artists through their appropriations—an act with complex, multilayered effects on the discourse of racial identity in art history. In one sense, contemporary artists’ appropriation is always already a subversive act (no matter their identity), in its rejection of the modern art market’s demand for originality and individual innovation as the source of art’s value. In another, appropriation is fundamentally conservative—it paradoxically shores up the interest in and significance of the original artwork it appropriates. Investigating these ambiguities offers a nuanced way of thinking through the troublesome relationship artists of color hold to institutions of contemporary art and art history, even in an era (the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries) in which overt support for multicultural inclusion demands their visibility and presence.

The term “appropriation art” carries conceptual baggage rooted in histories of art in the 1980s and the emergence of postmodernist theory as a dominant strain of art criticism. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, scholars debated the political efficacy of appropriation as a means of reckoning with the impact of postmodernity on contemporary culture. These debates coalesced around an exhibition curated by scholar and activist Douglas Crimp in 1977, *Pictures*, often cited as an epoch-defining example of the new, postmodernist interest in appropriation. The exhibition, at Artist’s Space in New York, included work in multiple

media by five artists, Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Phillip Smith. After the exhibition, Crimp reworked and expanded his catalogue essay for the journal *October*, catalyzing continued discussion (Crimp 1979). Crimp's original exhibition took on a new form in 2009, when curator Douglas Eklund restaged and expanded the original exhibition. He transformed the original, modest exhibition into a large, multi-artist retrospective called *The Pictures Generation* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Eklund added twenty-five artists to Crimp's initial roster in an effort to cement the status of the *Pictures* essay and its arguments, which we discuss later in this chapter. Yet, even in his celebration of the movement's conceptual framework, he continued to exclude the work of artists of color (Eklund 2009).

While "Pictures" has come to signify a broad generational tendency rather than referring only to the five artists featured in the 1977 exhibition, this original show proffered a limited definition of appropriation art. It featured only the work of white artists and, as art historian Riva Symko notes, Eklund's restaging of the show reinforced that racial bias (Symko 2019). While Crimp's iteration of *Pictures* focused mainly on those artists' conceptual approach to appropriation, Eklund's restaged version attempted to historicize what he termed "the Pictures Generation" by focusing on the venues key to this generation—mainly the galleries Artist's Space and Metro Pictures (both in New York)—via an expanded exhibition history of the artists Crimp had included. The unfortunate result was that all twenty-nine artists whose work was included in *The Pictures Generation* exhibition and catalogue were white, despite the fact that many prominent artists of color had long been pioneering similar appropriative, conceptual practices in other galleries at the same time: Romare Bearden used "pictures" conceptually in his collages of the 1970s to question the ways that identity was formed by the circulation of mass media and artistic images and, at the same time, Robert Colescott sampled from the history of art in his neo-expressionist paintings. Likewise, in the early 1980s, Carrie Mae Weems's and Lorna Simpson's works from the period juxtaposed pictures with text to explore how appropriated photographic images might convey different messages depending on how they interacted with texts. *The Pictures Generation* exhibition also ignored the significant appropriative work of Native American and first nations artists such as Carl Beam, who is known for his prolific work with appropriated photographs, refigured in ceramics, print, and multimedia pieces.¹ As Symko cogently argues:

The reality of the 1974–1984 period is that non-white artists were marginalized from this exhibition network, exhibiting instead at spaces founded by, and mandated to exhibit, artists of color. ... Although [artists of color] were practicing along similar image-making lines as the rest of the Pictures Generation between 1974 and 1984 ... creative practices in the original Pictures decade were clearly segregated along racial lines (Symko, 2019, 214–15).

Eklund's curatorial strategy obscured the segregated history of galleries by treating the exhibitions as if the quality of the artworks were neutrally determined without regard for artists' identities. Such pretenses occlude the ways in which, in traditional art history and curatorial practices, biases attached to the perceived race of the artist structurally determine which works are included in exhibitions and canons. By obscuring this history, *The Pictures Generation* exhibition reinforced the falsehood that appropriation art is primarily a movement pioneered by white artists.

In reality, appropriation is a formal and conceptual strategy that has been used creatively, critically, and effectively by many artists of color to comment on the relation between art and media, explore the relations among appropriated items, and intervene in art histories. Our chapter argues, by focusing on key works by Carrie Mae Weems, Glenn Ligon, and Nao Bustamante, that artists of color use this innovation not just for formal experimentation but also as a politically expedient tool to challenge white supremacy and expand

identity positions. This essay discusses three examples of appropriation by artists of color to highlight the diverse ways in which appropriation can be deployed: the appropriation of a specific artwork, the appropriation of discourse surrounding an object, and the appropriation of visual signs and stereotypes surrounding particular identities.

Our chapter explores these three modalities through a set of case studies of works by Weems, Ligon, and Bustamante. In the case of Carrie Mae Weems's *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1996), we explore how the artist repatriated source materials from institutional archives as part of a strategy called institutional critique. Likewise, we will investigate the series' relationship to works by Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, and Troy Brauntuch from the Pictures generation as a way to meditate on what appropriation *does* for Weems's works. In our discussion of Glenn Ligon's installation *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* (1991–1993), we argue that Ligon enacts a double appropriation, not only of queer photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's work but of the complex discourse surrounding his work in the period of the so-called culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, we explore Nao Bustamante's multimedia work *Silver and Gold* (2009), which appropriates images, themes, and affective modes from experimental filmmaker Jack Smith, without directly reproducing his work. If our first two case studies exemplify appropriation in the sense of "taking ownership" referenced earlier, our third example of appropriation operates more on the level of embodiment and performance.

Looking closely at these works offers a clearer understanding of the expansiveness and the ambiguity of what appropriation can do, for individual artists and for art history. Each of these cases represents the artist adapting an original source (artwork, discourse, experience) to explore the vicissitudes of identity, to expand their own intellectual frameworks, and to critique antiblack, antibrown, antigay, and antiwoman hierarchies within the art world and art history. We suggest that appropriation is an effective tool used by US-based artists of color to critique the limitations of art histories, to pry open the canon, and to demonstrate that artworks and their histories are not proprietary to elite white society but belong to the people.

Carrie Mae Weems

In 1995, Carrie Mae Weems mounted an installation titled *Carrie Mae Weems Reacts to Hidden Witness* at the J. Paul Getty Museum. The thirty-three works in the show—each of which was realized by the artist photographing the photographic print of another maker—would come to be known as *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1996). The first and last works in the installation feature the same iconic image of an African woman in profile; it has been enlarged and tinted cyan. The other thirty-one are tinted red; they present various images that have been blown up and framed by a black circular mat.

The piece from the series entitled *BLACK AND TANNED YOUR WHIPPED WIND OF CHANGE HOWLED LOW BLOWING ITSELF-HA-SMACK INTO THE MIDDLE OF ELLINGTON'S ORCHESTRA BILLIE HEARD IT TOO & CRIED STRANGE FRUIT TEARS* takes as its focus the violence that Black individuals have been forced to endure at the same time that it engages the semiotic play associated with conceptual art (Figure 22.1). Weems's subject is a man of African descent who sits with his back to the camera, his head presented in profile from the left, and his left arm extended away from his body. The grainy, softly focused, and washed-out quality of the print suggests that it is many generations from its original. Indeed, the 1860s black-and-white photograph, known as *The Scourged Back*, features the back of a man identified as "Gordon."² Weems reproduces the print in crimson, which is suggestive of the blood "Gordon" must have lost as a result of violence that is evidenced by the raised scars on his back. The artist enlarged the original *carte de visite* and cropped it and framed it with a circular black mat.³ The mat,



FIGURE 22.1 Carrie Mae Weems, *Carrie Mae Weems, Untitled (Black and Tanned)* from the *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* series, 1995, C-print with sandblasted text on glass (26 1/2 × 22 1/4 inches). Carrie Mae Weems.

in combination with the centrally placed lines of text, draws attention to the man's back, on which can be seen a hideous constellation of scars, caused either by heavy lashing (or tanning) with a whip or by branding with a hot iron. The model's darkened face lends a haunting quality to the work, as if it too may bear scars. With his face in shadow and the abused skin surface of the back highlighted, the anonymous model functions as a surrogate, allowing viewers to imagine other violated individuals or to put themselves in his place.

The text is a bridge that links past and present experiences of African Americans. Her "you" is open, addressed to "you" the viewer, "you" the subject, and "you" the collective of Black people. Moreover, Weems's combination of a nineteenth-century image with references to musical artists from the not-so-distant past collapses time and space, suggesting an ancestral and experiential legacy that extends to present-day African American culture. The work indicates that the pain experienced by slaves emerged "smack in ... the middle of [Duke] Ellington's orchestra" and "Billie [Holiday] heard it too and cried."⁴ The artist omits the words "fantasy" from Ellington's song and "Holiday" from the singer's name words that ordinarily suggest play or recreation. The text is careful and controlled: it encourages viewers to explore how historic persecution and contemporary prejudice function in the collective psyche of African Americans. Weems evokes a line from the old African American hymn, "Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now," that seems to acknowledge and commemorate the rocky experiences of African Americans: what does not kill makes one stronger.⁵

Weems's formal choices also produce new meanings for the appropriated photograph that are specific to African American experience: circular framing is reminiscent of a peephole; it re-enacts voyeurism, the covetous gazing at something forbidden yet compelling. It

brings attention to the act of looking and the multiple ways that looking takes place. In other words, the work invokes the circular and circuitous life of *The Scourged Back*, an image that has lived a long and complicated life in the form of multiple *cartes de visite* that were bought and sold to fund abolitionist efforts, as an illustration in *Harper's Weekly*, as an object that is contained in and maintained by an archive, and as a work of art among other uses. Here, we see Weems employing the "aesthetics of administration" as a part of institutional critique and using the archive to critique the racist and paternalistic ideology that archives conventionally perpetuate by virtue of the fact that they continue to *own*, *lend*, and *circulate* images of African Americans—unscrupulously and often without context. In *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1996), Carrie Mae Weems practices institutional critique when she recovers from archives historic images taken by other photographers and reuses them. Her retrieval of a Robert Frank, Walker Evans, or J. T. Zealy picture is more than an exploration of the narrative surrounding its making. She lodges a compounded critique of the original works' creation, subject matter, ownership, circulation, associated meanings, and the role institutions play in such processes. Through appropriating and reconfiguring readymade objects—strategies Weems employed previously in *American Icons* (1988–1989), *And 22 Million Very Tired and Very Angry People* (1991), and *The Sea Islands* (1992), among others—Weems's series shows how ideology attaches to such images and distributes its messaging to the farthest reaches of even the most altruistic of institutions. Glenn Ligon's *Notes on the Margins of the Black Book* works in similar ways. These series function similarly to but differently from the work of artists who are associated with the Pictures Generation.

The appropriation of found images is an important formal strategy used by the Pictures Generation, and it is a strategy that has worked well for Sherrie Levine, Troy Brauntuch, and Richard Prince. Focusing on Levine, she photographed reproductions of Walker Evans's photographs, images he created when he was part of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to create the works *After Walker Evans* (1981). *After Walker Evans* and other of her works in this vein critique the commodification of art and the myth of originality on which modern art is based. The artist distanced herself from her source objects through formal strategies that include enlarging, blurring, and recontextualizing the originals.

To be sure, Weems's work is in direct dialogue with Levine's: each artist appropriated Walker Evans's works, which triggers other narratives such as those surrounding the FSA, the poverty of the pictured subjects, embrace of these images in the history of art and photography, and uneven power relations, even as they trouble such histories. As her Pictures colleagues had done, Weems altered the source images in *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, by enlarging, cropping, toning, matting, and framing the recontextualized images even as they resonate visually with the daguerreotypes from which she sourced images.

Doubling down on these strategies by imagining stories for the pictured subjects and placing broken pieces of narratives into conversation with the appropriated images, Weems too appropriates images from archives and the history of art. Rather than emptying out the information as Crimp suggested Pictures artists did, Weems seems to reunite lost information to its rightful image and, at the same time, reinvest the images with different sets of information (Crimp 1979, 18). The charge of the work also lies in the information imparted in the text superimposed on the picture, which reads, "Black And Tanned/ Your Whipped Wind/ Of Change Howled Low/ Blowing Itself-Ha-Smack/ Into The Middle Of/ Ellington's Orchestra/ Billie Heard It Too &/ Cried Strange Fruit Tears." Weems's text collapses narratives, forcing viewers to draw on their understanding of certain words and phrases. An important aspect of "signifying" upon which Weems often relies is the once-necessary, but now-voluntary, encoding of information in texts and images in such a way that only insiders may understand its meaning (Gates, 46). Some of the words here, including "whipped," "blowing," and "smack," denote brutal actions, while others, such as "howled" and "cried," suggest suffering. The word "black" may refer to the designation given to the skin tones

of African Americans, to the historic practice of tarring individuals, or to evil associations. “Tanned” may indicate not only skin color, but also the action of beating skin during the leather-making process or as punishment, as in “tanning a hide.” Adding more complexity, the phrase “black and tanned,” references Duke Ellington’s song “Black and Tan Fantasy,” which was a slang term for interracial relations (Watrous 1999). Likewise, the artist’s construction of the phrase “black and tanned” brings to mind the expression, “black and blue,” connoting beaten and bruised flesh. Furthermore, Weems’s mention of “Strange Fruit,” a gut-wrenching song about the lynching of an African American man by hanging him from a tree, evokes powerful images of violence against African Americans.⁴ The indirectly indicated but clear nature of the narrative to which this work acts insidiously, getting under one’s skin, as the saying goes. By adding these imagined and appropriated fragments of information, Weems contributes greatly to the image’s affective possibility.

In contrast to Crimp’s claims that Pictures artists produce works that are “autonomous” from “representation as such” and “freed from the tyranny of the represented,” the pieces that form *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* seem to underscore meaning, bridging the distance between past and present, between what viewers know, understand, and feel. Weems’s pictures do not demonstrate a “withdrawal from signification” nor do they evince a fatalistic understanding of what images can do, even as they seem to align with Crimp’s premise that meaning can be reassigned and separated out from images (Crimp 1979, 14, 19). *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* suggests that images are not meaningless but are instead deeply meaningful. As we will see in the discussion of Ligon’s *Notes on the Margins of the Black Book* and Nao Bustamante’s *Silver and Gold*, recontextualization or reinvestment by the addition of different sets of information only enhances the source materials’ meaning and power, even if they continue to elude viewers’ understanding.

Glenn Ligon

Glenn Ligon’s installation *Notes on the Margins of the Black Book* (1991–1993) appropriates not only the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe but also the critical discourse surrounding these artworks.⁶ This monumental installation presents ninety-one photographs torn from a copy of Mapplethorpe’s (1986) monograph *Black Book* (Figure 22.2). *Black Book*’s sensuous black-and-white portraits, taken between 1977 and 1985, picture Black men, nude and clothed, in poses that range from sexually explicit to coyly innocent. Some of these men were Mapplethorpe’s lovers and friends, while others were models Mapplethorpe sought out for their look. In the mid-1980s, Mapplethorpe’s interest in photographing Black men drew substantial attention from critics. Some critics, such as Alan Hollinghurst, argued that Mapplethorpe’s focus on Black men as subjects added to their artistic merit:

It is not that Mapplethorpe is unaware of the political implications of a white man shooting physically magnificent black men, and such implicit tensions lend a piquancy to these pictures. But the stereotypes are transcended by a potent mood of celebration and sex, in which the artist reacts towards his subject with as much feeling as the camera allows (Hollinghurst 1983, 9).

Others such as the inimitable bell hooks were more skeptical: “Isn’t it interesting that the photographers always come just when the tribe is dying out? So too with the ‘celebration’ in these Mapplethorpe pictures of black men. Better catch them before they die out.”⁷ Read as a whole, the text of *Notes on the Margin* archives a dizzyingly complex discourse on the meaning of Mapplethorpe’s work, on the viability of interracial queer relationships for community building and activism, and on the relationship between art and the discourse that frames it.



FIGURE 22.2 Glenn Ligon, *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book*, 1991–1993, as installed for *Moving Pictures*, June 28, 2002–January 12, 2003. Offset prints and text. Ninety-one offset prints, framed (11 1/2 × 11 1/2 inches (29.2 × 29.2 cm) each); seventy-eight text pages, framed (5 1/4 × 7 1/4 inches (13.3 × 18.4 cm) each). David Heald / The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum/New York, NY. Artwork © Glenn Ligon.

Ligon's work, like that of Weems (who was influential to Ligon's practice) plays with the complex relation between image and text, reminding us especially of the failure of text to contain the signifiatory power of a photograph. However, while Weems writes her own texts, Ligon's appropriation of text draws our attention to the way collective discourse builds dynamically in politically charged and uneven ways. *Notes on the Margin* restages Mapplethorpe's pictures in two rows that frame small, printed texts appropriated from a diverse range of commentators including artists, politicians, Christian pundits, scholars, and drag queens. As art historian Richard Meyer notes, the cumulative effect of this cacophony is not a "happy plurality of diverse perspectives" but a critical engagement with the way Mapplethorpe's Black male nudes operate as a "cultural screen onto which both fears and fantasies are projected" (Meyer 1997, 20). Over the past thirty years, *Notes on the Margin* has been written about widely, in museum catalogues, scholarly monographs, dissertations, and journal articles.⁸ This literature tends to focus on Ligon's critique of Mapplethorpe's exploitive presentation of Black men as the central message of the installation. Most scholars make this argument by reading the texts, which are also appropriated, as if their meaning were self-evident relative to the photographs. In contrast, paying careful attention to Ligon's appropriative work combining text and image in purposefully disjunctive ways suggests that viewers notice the impossibility of grasping these objects (and how they acted on American culture) by reading only one take on them.

In addition to commenting on Mapplethorpe's artwork, the collection of texts Ligon assembled for *Notes on the Margin* evokes the complex cultural moment of the late 1980s and early 1990s in academia and American culture at large. Ligon began *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* in 1991, two years after Mapplethorpe's death, when a debate concerning the homoerotic photography in the Mapplethorpe exhibition *The Perfect Moment* at the Corcoran Gallery ignited a political battle over the use of tax-payer funds by the NEA—the US government funding agency, National Endowment for the Arts. (For a succinct summary of the "Perfect Moment" controversy see Vance 1999.) In addition to being a destructive time for public arts funding, this was a moment in which the

achievements of 1960s progressive movements, including civil rights, feminism, and gay liberation, faced scrutiny and challenge from both the left and the right. While Ligon's installation doesn't explicitly explain the role Mapplethorpe played in the US culture wars, it offers some of the flavor of that controversy by including quotations from right-wing commenters and their liberal antagonists. For example, Ligon quotes right-wing activist Rita Burke, who avows: "People looking at these kinds of pictures become addicts and spread AIDS."⁹ The bluntness of her words produce a shocking contrast to the thoughtful discussions of the formal elegance, "implicit tensions," or problematic presentation of racial stereotypes in Mapplethorpe's images.

Ligon's appropriation of these diverse texts produces a visual consolidation of the contradictions and omissions that characterize historical writing on the recent past. Reading them alongside Mapplethorpe's photography offers viewers a chance to sit in the muddled confusion of this conversation. While the culture wars are generally described as being about issues of sexuality during the AIDS epidemic, *Notes on the Margin* reminds us that race was an integral if invisible aspect of the turmoil in that period. Ligon's research on Mapplethorpe compiles the voices of many understudied Black queer artists and writers pushing for a new recognition of intersectional identity in the 1980s. Two of the most prominent of these voices, Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, began their collaborative work around the intersecting politics of sex and race with the Gay Black Group, a "small nucleus of gay men of Asian, African, and Caribbean descent" founded in London in 1981. (Mercer and Julien 1987, 97) As Mercer describes it, the Gay Black Group sought to get "issues of sex and race on the left agenda in both white and black communities," by bridging the gaps of activist discourse. *Notes on the Margin* also includes a number of quotations drawn from the texts assembled by Essex Hemphill in his literary anthology, *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Gay Black Men* (Hemphill 1991).¹⁰ As he explains in the introduction of *Brother to Brother*, Hemphill edited the anthology in order to begin establishing a literary tradition that critiqued "the post-Stonewall white gay community" for their indifference to gay Black men as anything but exotic sexual partners.

By combining the work of writers such as Mercer and Hemphill with quotations from Mapplethorpe's fans and detractors, and then layering this dissonant chorus of opinions around Mapplethorpe's photography, Ligon uses appropriation to generate something new—a more expansive, more ambivalent account of recent history. Ligon's *Notes on the Margin* not only asks viewers to reconsider Mapplethorpe's photography but offers them a historically and discursively rich way of doing it. Wrapping Mapplethorpe's photographs of Black men in texts written by Mapplethorpe's Black peers produces a powerful historical intervention. What's more, this new combination of text and image changes the impact of Mapplethorpe's portraits of Black men; it refigures the photographs into source material for understanding the complex interracial dynamics of gay community building and activism during the AIDS epidemic.

Nao Bustamante

Nao Bustamante's 2009 work *Silver and Gold* appropriates the work of experimental filmmaker Jack Smith, as well as the persona of Maria Montez, a Dominican film star and Smith's muse. *Silver and Gold* is a dynamic mixture of film and live performance that Bustamante terms *filmformance*. She developed *Silver and Gold* for the "Live Film! Jack Smith!" Festival held in Berlin in 2009, a queer academic conference/experimental film festival/artistic memorial convened on the twentieth anniversary of Smith's death.¹¹ Also attending the festival was a performer named René Rivera, better known by the stage-name Mario Montez (Siegel 2014a). The persona Mario Montez was a collaborative creation of Smith and Rivera, a glamorous, vulnerable, and powerful drag diva who starred in many of Smith's films.¹² Embodying a character ambiguously between and beyond Maria and Mario Montez,

Bustamante alternates between on-stage action and live narration of two original films as the character Maria, who transforms into an exotic queen intoxicated by her own power, and then disturbed by the biological outgrowth of that power, a rubbery pink phallus. The performance climaxes with a melodramatic suicide scene in which Maria drinks poison, followed by a memorial reel titled “Reveal.” In the final passage of the performance, Maria is resurrected from the dead to sell silver and gold jewelry to the audience in a send-up of the kitsch programming featured on the US-based Home Shopping Network or shopping channel QVC.

In contrast to the previous two forms of appropriation discussed in this chapter, Bustamante’s appropriation of Smith’s artwork is more diffuse, manifesting as moments of reference to and resonance with tropes of Smith’s practice sprinkled throughout the plot and aesthetics of *Silver and Gold*. Bustamante’s work doesn’t remake one specific film or performance by Smith with careful fidelity but instead traverses the eclectic scope of Smith’s characteristic style, subject matter, and approach to making. This style of appropriation is evocative in itself of Smith’s practice, which art historian Ann Reynolds has described as partaking in “eclectic mimicry” of his many and varied sources (Reynolds 2014). As Reynolds explains, Smith’s mimetic references have the potential to remind spectators of “other films, other actresses, other filmmakers, but because they are so fleeting, decontextualized, incomplete, willfully disjunctive, or ‘unsuccessful’ ... they produce a transient effect of reference rather than pointing to a specific, readable reference” (Reynolds 2014, 202). For Reynolds, the lack of precision in Smith’s mimicry is crucial to its effect and purpose: “One senses something is being attempted; a relationship with the past is being drawn. And that sensing becomes the experience, an end in itself” (Reynolds 2014, 202). For both Bustamante and Smith, *affects*—feelings that are more bodily, unspecific, and fugitive than named emotions—are born from the evocative images in their work that communicate somewhere between and beyond the narrative lines of linguistic communication.

Early in *Silver and Gold*, the character Maria discovers a mannequin in the woods wearing a silver-sequined caftan, adorned with a purple, pink, and gold pattern of palm trees, and a grand golden headpiece. This costume, with its metallic headdress, seems tuned to evoke the dazzling costumes worn by Montez in her 1942 film *Arabian Nights*, or that of drag performer Mario Montez in Smith’s films *Flaming Creatures* and *Normal Love*, without being an exact reproduction. Bustamante produced a publicity image to promote *Silver and Gold* that rhymes with Montez’s publicity stills for *Arabian Nights*, and Mario Montez’s image in some of Smith’s photographs. In these images, Bustamante and both Montezes wear similar golden turbans and strategically downcast eyes that regard the camera with a side-long look (Figure 22.3).

Smith developed an aesthetic of camp Orientalism beginning in his films from the early 1960s, inspired by the films of Montez and other works of American Orientalist fantasy.¹³ Maria Montez’s performances in Hollywood films were likewise appropriations of cultures and stories outside the realm of her own experience. While Montez spoke with a pronounced Dominican accent, her success in films such as *Arabian Nights* expanded her performative domain beyond Hispanic characters to the fantastically broad geography of the Orientalist imaginary.¹⁴ She portrayed characters from North Africa and the Middle East, Southern Africa, Europe, and all over the Pacific Rim, all while maintaining the same vocal accent and look.¹⁵ Montez’s films were Orientalist in that they both produced and satisfied an American desire for escapism by offering up an imagined culture of otherness that fused disparate aesthetic signs and references.

Montez’s stardom was paradoxically both elevated and limited by the perception of her *latinidad*. In the early 1940s, she was among a small group of Latin American women, including the Brazilian star Carmen Miranda and Mexican actresses Dolores del Río and Lupe Vélez, who managed to achieve stardom in the US film industry. The template for Latin American stars in this period relied on a fixed body of tropes known as the “Latin Spitfire” stereotype, which presented Latin women as sensual, passionate, and humorous because of their accented pronunciation of English (Méndez 2018). Like Miranda, del Río,



FIGURE 22.3 Nao Bustamante, publicity photograph for *Silver and Gold*, 2009. Artwork © Nao Bustamante. Photo by Eleanor Goldsmith. Nao Bustamante (Chapter Author).

and Vélez, Montez was a relatively fair-skinned woman who could easily “pass” as white if not for her accented speech, which, as historian Danny Méndez explains, marked her as incontrovertibly “other” in the US context (Méndez 2018). This barrier to Montez’s assimilation in 1940s Hollywood meant she would be denied access to roles that were racialized as white—dramatic leading lady roles—consigned instead to portraying a diverse array of “ethnic” characters played for comedy and exotic flavor.

Smith scholars write often about his Montez-worship, but few have reflected on the complex racial politics of his presentation of Montez.¹⁶ For that matter, while much has been written about Smith’s work relative to queerness, little has been said about his work’s representation of race, despite the fact that non-white performers and characters appear in nearly all his projects.¹⁷ Redressing this erasure, *Silver and Gold* offers an opportunity to think through (and value) the affective work performed by Montez in the oppressive domain of Hollywood culture. In the final passage of *Silver and Gold*, a film titled *Reveal*, Bustamante’s performance as Maria seems to diverge from Smith’s image of Montez and become more personal. Bustamante performs as Maria in a range of imagined film clips strung together for a “memorial reel” honoring the late actress.¹⁸ The reel strings together “clips” from the great performative moments of Maria’s fictive career, like the montages of film clips played at the Academy Awards to honor a great actor after they have passed.¹⁹

Bustamante’s *Silver and Gold* brings an empathetic racial consciousness to Maria Montez that is underdeveloped in the existing literature on Smith’s practice. This racial consciousness operates at the level of suggestion and emotion more than discourse, in line with what Bustamante’s close friend and collaborator José Esteban Muñoz called a shared “sense of brownness,” an affective experience that transcends the issues of cultural specificity that

plague *latinidad* identity (Muñoz 2020). Writers, activists, and scholars of Latin American and Latinx studies have debated the usefulness of the term *latinidad*, which has (like Orientalism) the capacity to efface national boundaries, as well as political, cultural, and historical specificity by referring to the diverse whole of Latin America and its diasporas as a united entity (see e.g. Salazar 2019; Scharrón-del Río and Aja 2015). As scholar Deborah Paredez puts it, “Latinidad slips easily from one’s grasp” (Paredez 2009, 23). As a Mexican-American woman born and raised in California, Bustamante’s cultural connection to the Dominican Montez is not so much about national/ethnic origins or language as it is about the more diffuse identification of diasporic Latinx people with Latin Americans. In contrast to discourses on *latinidad* that rely on shared geography, Muñoz describes “brownness” as knowable through its “affective contours” (Muñoz 2014, 250).

Certain scenes in *Reveal* emphasize Maria’s “sense of brown” by suggesting her alienation and disconnection from her social milieu. In one scene, Maria dances on a table at a party of people who seem like typical white university faculty and graduate students—an environment Bustamante likely encounters often as a professor at elite US institutions. Maria’s unselfconscious dancing is brought to a startling conclusion when a white man slaps her dramatically across the face, throwing her violently to the floor. She looks around desperately, seeing that no one seems to have noticed or cared about the senseless violence she just experienced. The mystery of the scene does not divulge a didactic narrative about racial politics, but Maria’s tortured look of confusion and shame resonates with the “sense of brownness” Muñoz described, a sense that connects Bustamante to Montez even as her melodramatic performance parodies Montez.

While we would be inclined to argue that all appropriation is performative in the sense that the appropriator is functionally performing the action of the original artist by presenting that work as their own, Bustamante’s appropriation through literal performance brings additional considerations to the question of what appropriation *does*. By performing as Montez, or Smith’s version of Montez, Bustamante not only uses the work of another artist but *embodies* that artist, an act that constitutes a performance across boundaries of cultural and generational difference. What does it mean for Bustamante (a Mexican-American woman born in 1969) to embody the persona of Maria Montez (a Dominican woman born in 1912) as reimagined by Jack Smith (a white man born in 1932), while also expressing herself, her sense of Brownness, and her individual experiences of racial prejudice? The layers of appropriation are dizzying, and challenge contemporary strictures about political correctness that condemn cultural appropriation as always regressive and taboo. The manifold vectors of cultural appropriation ricocheting through Bustamante’s work, as if in a hall of mirrors, push us to question notions of culture as self-contained, authentic, or sacrosanct.

While the Pictures artists were lauded for (supposedly) evacuating the appropriated image of its original signification and setting it on a new path toward a post-structural endless chain of meanings, the artists we have discussed here all insist on grounding their appropriated images in content and context that is reworked to emphasize their own viewpoints and critical agendas. Bustamante, like Ligon and Weems, appropriates particular icons and narratives, but with her performances within performances she does something different as well. Her appropriations are experiential. Bustamante’s stepping into Montez’s and Smith’s personifications/personae is akin to radical empathy, a short-lived becoming-one-with that promises insight and intimacy in ways that Weems’s and Ligon’s pieces do not.

Conclusion

The Weems, Ligon, and Bustamante works considered here offer three modes of appropriation that disrupt the high-versus-low arrangement of artistic media, just as they counter art discourses that ignore how identification inflects appropriative practices. We suggest they throw the artistic ideal of authenticity—in which originality is prized and reproduction is

devalued—on its head. Their work reaffirms the singularity of their own artworks by producing something entirely different from its parts. The artists subvert the unquestioned authority of the objects, images, and practices they reproduce or reperform at the same time that they assert the history and perseverance of minority people in the face of discrimination. At the same time, Weems's, Ligon's, and Bustamante's appropriations each offer an affective relationship with the past, particularly in their empathetic connection to the subjects of these artworks—Gordon, Mapplethorpe's models, and Maria Montez. Moreover, they enter into a long struggle against negative representations and stereotypes in which many other artists have participated. But, rather than presenting positive images (as many artists in the 1970s strove to do), they meet negative representations head on, unpacking their histories and parsing their effects through irony, disruption, and even appreciation. Their artworks challenge Euro-American frameworks, just as this chapter expands histories of appropriation.

Notes

- 1 Allen J. Ryan (1999) identified the practice of appropriation in the work of contemporary Native American artists with the "Native Trickster" tradition.
- 2 Weems's print appears to be a reproduction of a photograph entitled *The Scourged Back*. Taken by McPherson and Oliver of New Orleans in 1863, the photograph pictures the back of Gordon, an escaped slave, at the time of a medical examination. The image was later reproduced by McAllister & Brothers of Philadelphia and distributed internationally as abolitionist propaganda. For more information and an illustration, see Collins (1985, 43–45).
- 3 *Cartes de visite* are nineteenth-century photographs that were glued to cardboard backing. These visiting cards were produced and disseminated commercially and traded among friends.
- 4 The song "Strange Fruit," originally a poem, was written by Abel Meeropol, a.k.a. Lewis Allan, in the mid-1930s as a protest against lynching and was performed by Billie Holiday after 1938. For more information, see Margolick (1998).
- 5 This line is from the hymn "On Mah Journey Now," and is quoted in bell hooks, "Diasporic Landscapes of Longing," *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 65.
- 6 Jessi DiTillio discusses the use of parody and appropriation in this work and Bustamante's at length in DiTillio (2021).
- 7 This quotation appears on the 26th text card in Ligon's installation.
- 8 Scott Rothkopf's essay in *Glenn Ligon: America*, ed. Scott Rothkopf (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2011), 34–36, is one of the most careful analyses of *Notes on the Margin*. Before Rothkopf, curator Okwui Enwezor included *Notes on the Margin* in his iconic 2008 exhibition *Archive Fever*, which was held at the International Center of Photography in New York. Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography; Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2008). See also Lauri Firstenberg, "Neo-Archival and Textual Modes of Production: An Interview with Glenn Ligon," *Art Journal* 60, n. 1 (March 2001), 42–47.
- 9 Ligon quotes Burke in the 14th text panel. The original quotation was published in Butterfield (1990).
- 10 Ligon quotes Hemphill in the 44th text card of *Notes on the Margin*, "What is insulting and endangering to Black men is Mapplethorpe's *conscious* determination that the faces, the heads, and by extension, the minds and experiences of some of his Black subjects are not as important as close up shots of their cocks."
- 11 Festival curator Marc Siegel assembled a selection of essays that emerged from the festival for a special issue of the journal *Criticism* titled "Jack Smith: Beyond the Rented World," which included ten new essays. See Siegel (2014a, i–ii).

- 12 On Mario Montez, see McColgen (1967); Siegel (2014b); Muñoz (2014).
- 13 For an in-depth discussion of Orientalism in Smith's work see Moon (1998, 67–93).
- 14 Postcolonial theorist Edward Said transformed the term "Orientalism" from its original function, as an often pejorative adjective applied to objects of "Oriental Studies," the name of an academic discipline, to describe the discourse conducted in Western Europe that imagined the East, and especially Eastern colonial subjects, as diametrically opposed to the West through their voluptuous, passionate, and erotic lifestyles. See Said (1979).
- 15 For more on Montez and her filmography see Méndez (2018).
- 16 As Smith scholar Juan Suárez argues, "we have dealt with the queer Smith," the "socialist Smith," the "anarchist Smith," and the "anti-art Smith," but have yet to fully explore the "tropicalist Smith, a fascinated consumer, deployer and subverter of Latin exotica." Suárez (2014) suggests that this absence in the Smith literature is because perhaps Smith's exoticism is "slightly embarrassing... in these days of precise, situated critique."
- 17 The two exceptions to this rule are José Esteban Muñoz and Juan A. Suárez. See Suárez (2014) and Muñoz (XXX, xiv).
- 18 This work is available on Nao Bustamante's Vimeo Page, <https://vimeo.com/88286425>.
- 19 *Reveal* was not a part of *Silver and Gold* as Bustamante performed it at the *Live Film! Jack Smith!* festival, but she has incorporated it in later iterations of the performance. Nao Bustamante, conversation with the author, July 20, 2018, Los Angeles, California.

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DISABILITY

Disability Justice, Community, and Performance

Shayda Kafai and Jennette Ramirez

Disabled community: We carry within us a history of resilience, of diverse communities who participated in marches and sit-ins, who fought for and passed legislation. We are a part of a history of bodyminds¹ who fought for equality from our sick beds and who protested and organized campaigns from our homes. Since the beginning of the US mainstream Disability Rights Movement in the 1930s, we have entered public fields of visibility to demonstrate against nondisabled supremacy's urging that desirability, wholeness, and humanness (Siebers 2008, 10) are associated with nondisability, and not our bodyminds.² We are persistent in the ways we fight against the lineage of eugenics, against ableism's insistence that we are simply childlike, passive, desexual objects of pity. Disability Justice activist and disabled queer of color activist Stacey Milbern defines ableism as "a system of oppression that favors able-bodiedness at any cost, frequently at the expense of people with disabilities ... ableism touches every aspect of life" (Berne and Milbern 2017). In the midst of this system, disabled artmakers are the cultural workers and meaning-makers who galvanize us, who fuel us forward. Disabled artmakers are the dreamers who remind us that we, in fact, as Alison Kafer writes, deserve "a politics of crip futurity."³

We locate our exploration of disability and performance in Disability Studies, a US and UK-based interdisciplinary academic discipline that grew from activism. By challenging the meaning of physical and cognitive normalcy, Disability Studies interrogates normative ideologies and their political and sociocultural constructions of disability. This includes the outdated, though still upheld, medical model of disability that determines disability as pathology and defect, as something that requires fixing and curing (Siebers 2008, 3). As opposed to examining the systemic power structures that impact disabled bodyminds, this model is reductive. Disability Studies provides alternative frameworks that consider how we center and celebrate nondisability while disparaging disability.⁴ It invites a disability analysis that intersects with positionalities including "race, class, gender, nation, and sexual identity" (Erevelles and Kafer 2010). Here, disability grows into a politicized and empowered identity that we, for the sake of this project, define broadly: "physical impairments, people

who belong to a sensory minority, people with emotional disabilities, people with cognitive challenges, and those with chronic/severe illness ... and others whose bodies do not conform to our culture(s)' notions of 'normal' or 'functional.'"⁵

While we locate our chapter in Disability Studies and its critical practice of dismantling the sociopolitical power and privilege of nondisability, we specify our analysis at the nexus of disability scholarship, activism, and performance converge. Grounded in the disability art movement that began in the 1970s and continued to robustly grow in the 1990s, disability performance art provides space where disabled communities and collective, politicized identities are born (Barnes and Mercer 2001). Disability performance art in particular carries deep personal resonance for us as disabled writers. In writing this chapter, we called forward our first two memories of witnessing disability performance art, the somatic, tangible experience of politicized identity formation that comes with seeing (in all the diverse ways we "see") our communities' manifest agency. In these moments, we learned that our bodyminds were more than diagnoses and shame; we learned that performance can lead us toward change.

Shayda shared memories of first watching *Disability Culture Rap* (1992) as a graduate student and hearing disabled poet and activist Cheryl Marie Wade assert: "Disability culture—what is it about—POWER!" Jennette shared memories of watching the 1995 documentary *Vital Signs: CripCulture Talks Back*, and seeing disabled artist Mary Duffy's crippling of the Venus de Milo. These two moments of disability performance art communicated so much for us.⁶ We began to understand that, while the mainstream Disability Rights Movement's call—"nothing about us, without us"—mobilized protests and the passage of legislation, it too influenced the production of visual and performing arts by disabled, Mad,⁷ and chronically ill artists. From this activist lineage, performance became a place with radically revisionist potentials. These performative entry points also left us as disabled folks of color who are queer and nonbinary needing more: What could an intersectional disability performance art offer? What other stories could they tell?

We are drawn to performance art's engagement with the stage, to the ways it offers disabled artists rich and sustaining ways to shift conversations about disability and embodiment. Disabled performance artist, scholar, and activist Petra Kupperts writes that performance provides disabled artists "a new cityscape. It both erects and celebrates new knowledges, orders them for public consumption, makes them accessible in ways that mere language cannot (yet)" (Kupperts 2013, 2). In this new cityscape, disabled performance artists invite audiences to reinvent disability as an agentic, kaleidoscopic narrative of experience no longer restricted by ableism or any of the oppressive networks that oppress our disabled, chronically ill, Mad bodyminds. In this terrain, we are invited to experience disability performance art's cultural and political shifts (Barnes 2003; Eisenhauer 2007; Kupperts 2013; Sandhal and Auslander 2009).

Disability performances could not offer new, crip cityscapes were it not for disability activism. The mainstream Disability Rights Movement, particularly its organizing work from the 1970s through the 1990s, paved the way for disabled representation, and equal access to transportation, employment, and housing.⁸ It also ensured equal protection under the law with the Americans with Disabilities Act in the United States, and in the 1980s, it provided the groundwork for Disability Studies (Longmore 2003, 2). The mainstream Disability Rights Movement was critical to the collective thriving of the disability community. We, as disabled, Mad scholars, could not, for example, have arrived at this place of writing, learning, and teaching in academia without this movement. Given these strengths, however, the movement had key gaps that left behind disabled folks who lived in the intersections. In 2005, disabled, queer of color activists Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, and Stacey Milbern formally gathered to manifest a new,

more inclusive framework. They were supported by Leroy F. Moore Jr., Eli Clare, and Sebastian Margaret. Berne identified the gaps of the mainstream Disability Rights Movement in this way:

[it] invisibilized the lives of peoples who lived at intersecting junctures of oppression—disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender nonconforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others (Berne 2015).

The community that continued to grow and develop Disability Justice includes movement workers, artists, and activists located in the San Francisco Bay Area as well as Disability Justice Collectives based in New York, Seattle, and Vancouver. The list of disabled, queer, gender nonconforming, trans of color community members who helped to nourish Disability Justice is vast, and most critically, the movement reflects the experiences, needs, and voices of the disabled intersectional many. Many of these artist-activists are also involved with *Sins Invalid*, a performance project that began in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2006. We specifically focus this chapter on *Sins Invalid* because of their politicized artmaking and their rootedness in this activist lineage.

Organized through the framework of Disability Justice and centering the multidisciplinary performance work of disabled, queer, gender nonconforming, and trans of color artists, *Sins Invalid*'s community of artist-activists created the first Disability Justice primer in 2017 entitled *Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Our Movement is Our People*; their second edition was released in 2019. Through this movement building work, *Sins Invalid* demonstrates how crippled, queered, and decolonial performance art can cultivate new definitions of what disabled bodyminds and their communities can do. When exploring what makes their work unique, we call forward Sara Ahmed's discussion on willfulness (Ahmed 2016). For Ahmed, willfulness becomes a feminist, queer of color tool that provides us the persistence we need to dismantle oppression, and beyond that, the persistence we need to create systemic change: "[w]hen you are charged with willfulness it is as if your being is an insistence on being, a refusal to give way, to give up, to give up your way. ... If we are charged with willfulness, we can accept and mobilize this charge" (Archey 2015). *Sins Invalid* willfully persists against nondisabled supremacy. Their cultivation of Disability Justice serves as the charge, as the response to the mainstream Disability Rights Movement that invites us to mobilize past a solely rights-based framework. For *Sins Invalid*, performing disabled, queer of color bodymind stories stage mobilize inquiry into ableism's intersections with capitalism, cis-heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy.⁹ For *Sins Invalid*, to perform and create willfully serves as an act of queer, crip of color persistence dreaming: our disabled, queer of color bodyminds deserve to live free from ableism and the medical model of disability. Our needs are not shameful; they are an essential part of our collective liberation. To perform from this place is an act of rebellion (see Figure 23.1). It is a way of boldly inquiring, as Disability Justice asserts and as *Sins Invalid*'s Berne asks at the beginning of their 2008 performance as Māori wheelchair dancer Rodney Bell hangs suspended over the stage: "Is this safe? Are you safe? Are you sufficiently insulated from us, the deviant, the disabled, the nonnormative, the crippled, or might you become stained by our leaking needs?" *Sins Invalid* demands we rebel-shake nondisabled supremacy and all its reductions from our communities outward. This is their gift, their sacred crip offering: when informed by a Disability Justice framework, disability performance art becomes a routing, a resilience map that the disabled, queer of color community can follow. Here, disability performance art becomes a manifestation of our radical, disabled, queer of color futures and communities.



FIGURE 23.1 Rodney Bell, *Wheelchair Suspension*, 2022, performance. A tanned Maori wheelchair user hangs above stage against a blue background. Their body grips onto a suspension rope that is attached to their wheelchair. They are shirtless, wearing black pants and shoes, exposing a tattoo on their back as well as their face. Photograph by Richard Downing and Courtesy of Sins Invalid.

Unearthing the History of the Stage

When disabled performers roll, step, limp, and crawl on stage, they enter a discursive space imbued with both metaphor and oppressive history. Kuppers identifies the stage as a “laboratory of the performance situation,” a place where “knowledges can be re-examined, and questioned again and again” (Kuppers 2013, 3). She writes that disabled performers are particularly “aware of the knowledges that have been erected around them: tragic, poor, helpless, heroic, struggling, etc” (Kuppers 2013, 2). These mythologized stereotypes are brought to bear on the stage. These narratives are amplified when we consider that those who occupy the stage are also forced to contend with the stare.

US history is strongly rooted in the politics of the stare. Centuries before disabled performers such as Mary Duffy and Sins Invalid dared to stare back on stage, the largely European and American freak shows and sideshows of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century exploited disabled bodyminds for profit and entertainment. The freak show, defined as a “formally organized exhibition of people with alleged and real physical, mental, or behavioral anomalies for amusement and profit,” is an early example of a public space in which disabled bodies operated and were hypervisible (Bogdan 1988, 6). Freak shows displayed corporeal Otherness, framing the stage as hierarchical territory: who was normal and who was Other was made clear by who occupied the stage and who engaged in staring (Clare 2003; Garland-Thomson 1997; Millet-Gallant 2010). There is sensation associated with staring and with being the recipient of the stare. When the stage becomes a mechanism of marginalization, the disabled bodyminds who occupy it become spectacles to be seen; they become reductions, unidimensional objects, specimens (Eisenhauer 2007, 12). The stage was a public space that reified disability, pushing disabled bodyminds further and further to the margins.¹⁰ This history reminds us that the stage was not just a place for our collective storytelling and change-making. It also exploited and mocked disabled performers, constructing distinct, clear categories: nondisabled/disabled and normal/abnormal.

Ableism and the medical model of disability and ableism perpetuated this cycle of Othering. It is through Disability Justice, however, that we are reminded to pull the lens past the mainstream Disability Rights Movement’s focus on ableism to consider the ways in which other systemic forms of oppression intersect with and contribute to it. Patty Berne

writes that Disability Justice acknowledges how white supremacy and ableism are interwoven: “white supremacy uses ableism to create a lesser/‘Other’ group of people that is deemed less worthy/abled/smart/capable” (Sins Invalid 2019a, 18). This expansion of understanding also serves as a powerful container for the exploration of freak shows. In exploring the intersection between ableism, white supremacy, and imperialism, for example, Eli Clare explores how some disabled folks of color like William Johnson were put on display to demonstrate both pathology and animalistic savagery: as “a cognitively disabled African American man from New Jersey, [William] became the ‘What Is It?’ the ‘missing link,’ the ‘Monkey Man’” (Clare 2003, 258). For the many disabled folks who were on display in freak shows, the stage became a space occupied by this oppressive history; this legacy was even more complex for disabled people of color. To understand how the freak show dictated meaning around community members like William Johnson, we must, in accordance with Disability Justice’s intersectional framework, explore the ways in which ideas about Otherness and racial fetishization framed disabled people of color. Informed by coloniality, racism, and ableism, the person of color on stage was presented as the binary opposite to the white, European bodymind; in this power dynamic, the former became the Other, the savage, and the subhuman (Bhabha 1990).

Within the freak show, the stage became the place of relationality and normative storytelling, a place that constructed and replicated power relations. Spectators were taught to view disabled bodyminds and disabled bodyminds of color as monstrous oddities, as defective and Othered objects of awe and wonderment merely because of the visible characteristics of their bodyminds (Bogdan 1988, 222). This rendered the stage a disciplinary tool that defined representation, worth, and personhood. Here, the power of the stare became a one-way event where the spectator arrived and left empowered. It became a place where white, nondisabled bodyminds were reinforced as the standard of normativity.

Sins Invalid calls this legacy forward in their work. They use Disability Justice informed performance art to interrogate ableism and how it supports colonialism, white supremacy, and cis-heteropatriarchy. In their program for a 2009 evening of multidisciplinary performance art on stage at the Brava Theater in San Francisco, disabled British actor and artist Mat Fraser performed *No Retreat, No Surrender*. In 2006, Fraser had been a performer in Coney Island’s Sideshow by the Seashore as Seal Boy, a recreation of the sideshow performer Stanley Berent.¹¹ Similar to Berent, Fraser has phocomelic arms, the medicalized term for his impairment. In his recreation of “Sealboy: Freak,” he provides us with a necessary exploration of power, the stare, and the stage. In her analysis of Fraser’s intentional occupation of the freak show stage, Kupperts writes that he “wishes to query the dynamics that pertain to his engagement with his audience” (Kupperts 2013, 13). Through this lens, the stage can become a politicized, crippled place where disabled performers can deconstruct and reform its normative powers; *No Retreat, No Surrender* is an extension of this work.

As the performance begins, Fraser walks on stage with a fighting stance, bouncing back and forth on his feet, staring straight out into the audience. During the performance, Fraser physically fights back against the voices that boom overhead in the theater. They begin by applauding him: “you’re very brave, well done” and “you are my hero of the day.” As the performance progresses, the intensity of the voices increases, and Fraser is accosted with the toxic: “I could never do it with a handicapped person” and “reproduction is a mistake.” With each statement, Fraser’s body jolts back, until he falls to the ground, spitting blood from his mouth. The performance ends with his limp body being dragged off stage. When these verbal assaults occur offstage in Fraser’s daily life, they are frequently coupled with stares. This performance invites spectators to consider the physical, tangible harm of their stares.¹²

The voices that audiences hear emanating from overhead (or read in the transcription) serve as tangible assaults of nondisabled supremacy. We hear the medical model made manifest, and similar to the narratives of the freak show stage, nondisabled supremacy offers

limited narratives. Inspiration porn—a narrative that fetishizes the disabled for the sole purpose of galvanizing the nondisabled—is a term coined by Stella Young, an Australian comedian and disability activist who discussed the parameters of this framework on the TED stage in 2014 (Young 2014). This structure is what Fraser’s body contends with at the beginning of his performance: “you’re very brave, well done ... It’s so good for my kids to have you as a disabled friend.” As Fraser leaps and kicks this narrative, he falls to the stage. The pervasiveness of this reductive framing disempowers him. Although Young identified inspiration porn in 2014, its ableist argument also existed on the freak show stage, particularly when we consider the dynamic of the freak show: freaks reinforced the spectator’s normalcy (Garland-Thomson 1997, 65).

While Fraser tries to fight back against inspiration porn in his performance, he ultimately loses because of nondisabled supremacy’s persistence. Fraser’s performance, however, intervenes in this cycle by engaging with “Recognizing Wholeness,” the fifth principle of Disability Justice: “Each person is full of history and life experience. Each person has an internal experience composed of our own thoughts, sensations, emotions, sexual fantasies, perceptions, and quirks. Disabled people are whole people” (Sins Invalid 2019b, 24). This communally crafted language centers wholeness as integral, as a determined way to resist ableism, the medical model, and inspiration porn’s insistence that disability equates to defect, damage, and powerlessness. This is what the principle of wholeness offers: despite the historical narratives of freakery and Otherness, despite the medical model of disability, we are reminded that our bodymind stories exist distinct from these lineages. Fraser’s performance is a testament to this persistent battle.

No Retreat, No Surrender also models the empowered crip strategy of storytelling. Storytelling is a way for the disabled community to craft new bodymind stories of resistance. In his description of storytelling, sociologist Arthur W. Frank writes, “the personal issue of telling stories about [disability and] illness is to give voice to the body, so that the changed body can become once again familiar in these stories” (Frank 1995, 2). Fraser’s bodymind storytelling roots itself in this process of familiarization, in pushing against and through all the oppressive networks that render him inspiration, specimen, and defect. His bold examination of the oppressions of language transforms the stage into a place of testimony, a place of questioning (Eisenhauer 2007, 12). In his use of the stage as a site of examination, Fraser disarms the legacy of the freak show by taking control of the narrative and using storytelling as a way to manifest the political need for crip wholeness. This is how a performative approach to disability can provide us with a radical shifting of meaning and history. Performance can create space for us to imagine disability beyond stigma.

Reclaiming Beauty, Reclaiming the Stare

To understand how *Sins Invalid* provides such a critical intervention through disability performance art, we also need to understand the ways in which, for disabled folks, particularly folks with visible disabilities, the oppressive dynamics of ableism extend past the literal stage. From the late 1800s to the early 1900s, San Francisco and Chicago, as well as many other major US cities, enacted what were known as the “Ugly Laws.” In addition to freak shows and sideshows, we name the US Ugly Laws as a historical touchstone, as another way to access and understand disability representation through the lens of ableism and fetishization. These regulations restricted nonnormative bodies’ movements and access to public visibility. In her seminal work *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, Susan Schweik writes that “Many versions of these statutes made clear in their titles that city leaders aimed the laws at a very particular target, the person who ‘exposed’ disease, maiming, deformity, or mutilation for the purpose of begging” (Schweik 2010, 2). This history identifies the restrictions

and exclusivities placed on public space and challenges the belief that public space is indeed for the public. Judith Butler explores the restrictions in this way:

Indeed, when we think about the embodied subject who exercises speech or moves through public space, across borders, it is usually presumed to be one that is already free to speak and move. Either that subject is endowed with that freedom as an inherent power, or that subject is presumed to live in a public space where open and supported movement is possible (Butler 2014, 3).

Ugly Laws structured the public as a normative space exclusively for the visibly nondisabled, the housed, and the employed. Normative subjects exercised their freedom and movement in public space based on legislative consent that they could enter public space without penalty, while their counterparts' movements were violently suppressed. In these ways, Ugly Laws extended the logic of freak shows: rather than attending a specific place for the purpose of reinforcing one's normalcy, one needed only to journey onto the streets. Far from occurring only in the distant past, the last Ugly Law wouldn't be repealed in Chicago until 1974 (Greiwe 2019). Most critically, Ugly Laws transformed the visible city terrain into a place of policing, a place where ableism intersected with class, gender, and ethnicity; Schweik, in particular, writes about the ways in which US immigration policy was also informed by the principles of Ugly Laws: "other law including ugly ordinances functioned in part as federal immigration policy writ small" (Schweik 2010, 168). The desirable citizen and the desirable bodymind became one and the same: a nondisabled, Anglo-American, middle or upper-class, non-immigrant person.

Although Ugly Laws have codified our perceptions of who we consider as valuable, valid, and desirable, of who we invite into and celebrate in public space, Sins Invalid provides us with robust re-envisioning. Their creation of crip-centric liberated zones provides us with the language and space to reassess the beauty of all our bodyminds. After several conversations with Patty Berne, Sins Invalid's co-founder, Executive, and Artistic Director, and Nomy Lamm, Sins Invalid's Creative Director, we came to understand crip-centric liberated zones as

a multidirectional community love practice ... It is a place of our creation where we, the disabled, queer of color many, can exist and thrive liberated from the oppressions that relegate our lives. When directed inward, the love practice of a crip-centric liberated zone gifts us with strategies for re-centering and decolonizing our bodyminds. When directed outward, the zone politically transforms the places we inhabit—even if temporarily—into hubs of communal bodymind witnessing (Kafai 2021, 43).

These spaces provide the disabled, queer of color community the opportunity to resist internalizing cycles of Othering and to be made familiar to themselves distinct from the oppressive histories of freak shows, sideshows, and Ugly Laws. They provide the opportunity for an empowered, agentic self-crafting of meaning in community, always in community. A crip-centric liberated zone, for Sins Invalid, can exist during their evenings of multidisciplinary performance art, during their educational programs, and through their workshops. These are transient spaces of communal care and acknowledgment that flourish in person and online.

During their evenings of multidisciplinary art, for example, Sins Invalid provides American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, along with audio descriptions, gender-neutral restrooms, roomy seats, a scent-free environment, and a quiet room. Entering a place where your needs are met, a place where you do not need to justify your bodymind needs is profound for so many of us. Crip-centric liberated zones give us modalities of disabled queer of color thriving that are antithetical to a normative ableist way of being. In relation to the

Ugly Laws, within the crip-centric liberated zones and their culture of care and refamiliarization, disabled folks are invited to reclaim and return the gaze, what Jennifer Eisenhauer calls “staring back”: disabled performance artists “transfor[m] the objectifying stares of the viewers into moments of personal agency through the performative act of *staring back*” (Eisenhauer 2007, 12). When we are rooted in a cross-disability space, one that through artmaking and activism challenges everything we have been normatively taught about disability, we are able to witness our communities and ourselves as whole for the first time. At this moment, we, too, have the opportunity to shift our relationship to the stare. We are no longer passive objects of nondisabled supremacy’s stares. In crip-centric liberated zones, we have the capacity to stare back, to reverse the power and linearity of the “staring relationship.”¹³

Within the crip-centric liberated zones they create, and through this practice of staring back, Sins Invalid opens space for us also to interrogate beauty. What would it look like to crip beauty, rather than continuing to analyze it through ableist, white supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchal lenses? What generative spaces could this shifting create? What new staring, or even non-staring, ways of encountering relationships might it invite? During a roundtable discussion about beauty that took place in 2018 among Disability Justice and trans liberation activists, including several members of Sins Invalid, nonbinary artist and poet Alok Vaid-Menon asserted that:

[L]iberation is about being liberated from ‘beauty’ and, in turn, approaching beauty with our own terms ... I believe it is possible to reclaim beauty for ourselves, by which I mean finding ways of relating to each other outside of what we’ve been taught to desire” (Vaid-Menon in Berne, Lewis, Vaid-Menon 2018, 244).

This reclamation of beauty aligns with Sins Invalid’s framing, their offering that, as Patty Berne shared, “beauty always, always recognizes itself” (Allen 2013). To crip beauty in this way asks that we salvage beauty from its normative rhetoric. For Sins Invalid, fostering crip beauty challenges the long and painful histories of the institutionalization, desexualization, and legislation that name visibly disabled bodyminds as diseased, maimed, and deformed. It is the idea that disabled bodyminds should be distanced from beauty or they should be fetishized. In their creation of a crip-centric liberated zone that amplifies a liberatory manifestation of crip beauty, Sins Invalid provides alternatives: beauty becomes a Fat, Jewish, amputee pouring honey lusciously over their nude body on stage; becomes a Black disabled man speak-spitting a poem about the sexual potency of his drool; becomes two Black men supporting one another as they walk slowly across the stage.¹⁴ For Sins Invalid, this change-making takes place when we name and cultivate crip beauty from a communal place informed by Disability Justice.

This reframing of beauty is most grounded in the second principle of Disability Justice: leadership of those most impacted. Sins Invalid defines this principle this way:

When we talk about ableism, racism, sexism & transmisogyny, colonization, police violence, etc., we are not looking to academics and experts to tell us what’s what—we are lifting up, listening to, reading, following, and highlighting the perspectives of those who are most impacted by the systems we fight against. By centering the leadership of those most impacted, we keep ourselves grounded in real-world problems and find creative strategies for resistance (Sins Invalid 2019b).

In listening to those most impacted by systemic oppression, we are invited to re-root beauty in the lessons of disabled, queer, gender nonconforming, trans people of color. While some in our disabled community have discussed the importance of eradicating the notion of beauty altogether,¹⁵ Sins Invalid instead argues that we can rehabilitate beauty



FIGURE 23.2 Nomy Lamm, *Wall of Fire*, 2022, performance. A black and white picture of a white Jewish amputee with curly hair sitting on a box on stage. They sit next to a table, their prosthetic leg resting on the floor, next to a microphone. They are wearing black and white knee-high socks as well as a form fitting dress with off the shoulder sleeves. In the background, orb shaped lights float. Photograph by Richard Downing and Courtesy of Sins Invalid.

when we center the wisdoms, experiences, and lessons of the most impacted by beauty and its oppressive networks (see Figure 23.2).

Sins Invalid's politic of beauty is also woven into their tagline: "an unshamed claim to beauty in the face of invisibility." To perform beauty in a distinctly queer, crip, decolonial way that is unshamed invites us to consider their reclamation of the stage, of the public, as a form of activism. Sins Invalid's performance of crip beauty highlights the hypervisible and invisible experiences of disabled bodyminds while emphasizing the importance of disabled bodyminds being visible on their own terms. Their refusal to be invisible is evident in their evenings of multidisciplinary performance art, and their online presence on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube with over 13,000 followers. Their physical and digital presence in the world encourages other disabled folks to inquire what an unshamed claim to beauty might feel like, as well as to ask key questions: How might we reconsider our bodymind presence using a framework that is fiercely rooted in the unshamed, in the recovery of beauty? How might we reform our conversations of desirability and worth?

Sins Invalid's Art as Communal Offering

On February 19, 2022 we interviewed Nomy Lamm. More than an interview, this conversation serves as record, as documentation of how Sins Invalid's Disability Justice practice intervenes in traditional frameworks of theater and performance art. Lamm began by asserting that "liberation" is "at the core of what we're doing in our performance work; it's like we are performing the truths of our stories and our visions and imaginations of what is possible. ... it's about showing what disabled people can do."¹⁶ Exploring the potential of what disabled people can do has been a goal of Disability Studies and Disability Performance Studies scholars;¹⁷ however, the assertion that our intersectional, disabled bodyminds can offer paths toward collective liberation is distinct to Sins Invalid's praxis. They define collective access as the practice, the expression, that will move us away from nondisabled supremacy and its privileging of nondisability: "How do we move together as people with mixed abilities, multiracial, multi-gendered, mixed class, across the orientation spectrum—where no body/mind is left behind?" (Sins Invalid 2019b).

In this call, Sins Invalid positions performance art as one of the activist practices that can both educate a nondisabled audience about the importance of bringing disability to the center and empower disabled audience members to embrace the liberatory potentials of their own bodyminds. During a conversation that she had early on with Berne about Sins Invalid's choice to engage in performance work, queer, disabled, femme writer, organizer, and Sins Invalid performance artist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha shared the following story:

I once asked [Berne] why she had chosen to use performance art as her primary way to advance disability justice. Why not just do a workshop? She paused and said, 'You know, I could do workshops until I was blue in the face, trying to convince white disabled people or able-bodied people of color to care about us. And I've done that. Or I could make a three-minute piece of performance art that shows them the inside of their dreams and nightmares and fucks their shit up. I close that route (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018).

The performance, whether it is viewed in person or digitally, becomes a place of shifting that allows for visceral bodymind interpretations. With immersion in performance art, Sins Invalid invites audiences to learn through feeling.

Another significant performative praxis for Sins Invalid is their centering of slowness. Sins Invalid intervenes in the capitalist expectation of burnout by amplifying the Disability Justice principle of sustainability:

We learn to pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long-term. We value the teachings of our bodies and experiences, and use them as a critical guide and reference point to help us move away from urgency and into a deep, slow, transformative, unstoppable wave of justice and liberation (Sins Invalid 2019b).

The disabled, chronically ill, Mad community have crafted an abundance of language to discuss the drains in bodymind capacity. Whether it's spoon theory (Miserandino 2003) or *crip time*¹⁸—an invitation to perceive and engage with time outside of ableism's expectations that our worth is contingent on our speed and production—disabled folks have declared normative time, in all its ableist, sanist, racist, capitalist formations, as a barrier to access. Disability Justice engages in a similar practice by urging that our movements must be sustainable, that we must acknowledge the need for slowness, for pacing, and for bodymind honoring.¹⁹

Lamm has noted that crip slowness and sustainability are indispensable parts of how Sins Invalid creates and organizes. In addition to having an awareness that everyone involved with the performance project has access needs, they engage in tangible practices of sustainability and embrace the pause:

one person might really need a big comfy chair that they can transfer out of their wheelchair and just like be kind of in a little nest backstage when they're not like getting ready to go on stage, or do directly coming off the stage, so that they ... have a space to not be in pain, and just be comfortable ... there's always food ... There's always you know somebody that has like a tincture that will, you know, help with anxiety. There's always like somebody stretching on the floor ... there's always, you know, at least one kind of like access support, person, backstage, just like for whatever might be needed.²⁰

Lamm calls this process "tending." We interpret tending as a demonstration of love, as a social justice practice. We find alignment between tending and what bell hooks calls an ethic of love (hooks 2006, 243), a practice that provides "Life-sustaining political communities

... the renewal of the spirit” (hooks 2006, 248). To tend to community is to provide care and consideration, to renew past oppressive models and standards of more mainstream theaters that do not consider Disability Justice. Lamm defines these normative spaces as “fast-paced,” as being dictated by the productivity mandate of “the show must go on.” When a love ethic and an engaged tending are at the heart of the performance and its creation, the performance culture becomes crip-centric and liberatory. This intentional interweaving and Disability Justice framework sets Sins Invalid’s disability performance art apart from other artmakers and performers.

Lamm shared that the experience of navigating the stare, the “gawking” a visibly disabled person experiences, also shifts in crip-centric liberated zones. For Sins Invalid, this staring dynamic is challenged through storytelling: “To tell the story that we want to tell ... totally shifts that [normative staring] dynamic and can be really deep medicine for people, both as performers, and as viewers.”²¹ Telling disabled, queer of color bodymind stories offers us a tether: we are invited to remember and learn new genealogies, new histories. It is political, as Leroy F. Moore Jr., the co-founder of Sins Invalid, describes: “[Sins Invalid becomes] the place where we can finally tell our stories as brown crips, as queer crips. [It’s where we can] tell the story of our ancestors. This storytelling is cultural activism.”²²

For Sins Invalid, storytelling is also expressed somatically, through movement. In her 2011 performance, writer, artist, and activist Aurora Levins Morales and African, Indigenous, Deaf, two-spirit dancer Antoine Hunter performed *Listen/Speak*, a reading of a poem set to movement. As Hunter dances, chain link fences are projected onto his body, and Morales speaks:

Open up. Make room. Let the circle grow. From the shadows steps a man from Tuskegee, syphilis raging untreated through his veins, gone blind, lame, and speechless while white doctors took notes, but here he speaks with a voice like a drums ... We unwrap our tongues, we bind our stories ... we change the ending, we begin, and begin again.²³

Sharing these traumas, these pasts, in public provides us with orientation. As Hunter moves on stage, his arms bow outward, holding an invisible weight. He spins, his body stiff, as he covers his face with a scarf that picks up the projected images of chain links. His body does not become grounded securely on stage until Morales speaks of changing the ending and beginning again. *Listen/Speak* offers a glimpse of an embodied, historical healing through storytelling, a growing past racist, ableist, historical traumas toward a new, self-crafted tether, what Lamm calls a disabled practice of “connecting to our ancestors.” Sins Invalid’s evenings of multidisciplinary art familiarize us to our intersectional disability histories, to the disabled ancestors of color whose names we might have never learned, and to the queer roots of our disability lineage.

The “Yet-To-/Be-Map”

In their Disability Justice primer, Sins Invalid asserts that Disability Justice is a “yet-to-be-map,” something that is not yet complete but that invites us on the journey of curiosity and exploration. As writers we use this offering as mapping and imagine how Sins Invalid informs the work of contemporary art and of disabled artist-activists: How could Disability Justice as politics and praxis guide *how* performances occur and *what* bodyminds are invited to move and story tell on stage? Perhaps one of the most poignant of Sins Invalid’s gifts is their invitation for contemporary performance art to consider what yet-to-be imaginings can manifest when community and disability exist at the heart.

Notes

- 1 Bodymind is a term of unification suggesting that our bodies and our minds never engage in isolation from one another. This concept has indigenous roots and has also been used by Disability Studies scholars like Petra Kuppers (2013) and Margaret Price (2015).
- 2 In the seminal disability history text, *Why I Burned My Book*, Paul Longmore (2003) roots the beginning of the mainstream Disability Rights Movement in the United States in the 1930s.
- 3 Crip is short for cripple. While it was initially used as a derogatory term, many disabled folks, particularly disabled folks of color, have shortened and reclaimed crip as an empowered, politicized identity. Alison Kafer (2013, 2) reminds us that, according to the medical model of disability, “disability is conceptualized as a terrible unending tragedy, [that] then any future that includes disability can only be a future to avoid.” Imagining a disabled future, then, is a radical act of possibility-making that many disabled activists, theorists, and artists embark upon.
- 4 The social model of disability opposes the medical model’s emphasis on pathology and defect and argues, instead, that the built environment is what disables individuals; however, even this model has limitations.
- 5 As our primary case study, we align with Sins Invalid’s definition of disability: “Our Mission,” Sins Invalid website, <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/mission>, accessed on June 7, 2022.
- 6 Similar to the history of queering as a verb, crippling offers a critical entry point for interrogating nondisabled supremacy. According to Carrie Sandahl (2003, 37): “Crippling spins mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects.”
- 7 The capitalization of Mad signals the work and activism of Mad activists and Mad studies scholars, originally in Canada, who argue that we need to problematize the stigmatic connotations of madness. Mad is now a politicized identity term.
- 8 While the mainstream Disability Rights Movement that we reference is Euro-American dominated, it is important to note that globally disability rights and organizing began formally with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, an international human rights treaty that was passed in 2006.
- 9 Cis-heteropatriarchy names the systems of power and regulatory control that comes from cisgender, heterosexual men.
- 10 Although freak shows and sideshows no longer exist, disabled people are still displayed for profit as a way to reinforce nondisabled supremacy. Many scholars including Eli Clare and Paul Longmore have written about the toxicity of telethons and the ways in which they perpetuate the charity model of disability as well as the freak show’s legacy of Othering and the stare. See Clare (2001, 359–365); Longmore (2003).
- 11 Stanley Berent’s stage name was Seal the Sealboy and is slightly distinct from Fraser’s Sealboy: Freak.
- 12 Scholars such as James Elkins, Jennifer Eisenhauer, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson have examined the ways in which staring, particularly staring at disabled bodyminds, objectifies and further distances the disabled bodymind from humanity. See Elkins (1996); Eisenhauer (2007); Garland-Thomson (2009).
- 13 The “staring relationship” was identified by Garland-Thomson (2009).
- 14 The capitalization of Fat comes from the legacy and movement building work of the Fat Pride and Fat Liberation movements. Scholars Sondra Solovay and Esther Rothblum point to the 1969 founding of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance as the moment when stereotypes of fatness and fat people began to be challenged (Solovay and Rothblum 2009).
- 15 To explore writing about beauty from this perspective, visit Mia Mingus’ blog post, “Moving Toward the Ugly” (August 21, 2011), available at: <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/08/22/moving-toward-the-ugly-a-politic-beyond-desirability>, accessed on July 19, 2022.

- 16 Nomy Lamm in discussion with Jennette Ramirez via Zoom, February 19, 2022. All citations with Nomy Lamm come from this original source.
- 17 Amanda Cachia, for example, has written about and has created an exhibit around this idea in 2012 entitled *What Can a Body Do?*; see her website: <https://amandacachia.com/curating/what-can-a-body-do>, accessed on July 19, 2022.
- 18 Alison Kafer and Ellen Samuels have explored the nuances of crip time. See Kafer (2013); Samuels (2017).
- 19 Tricia Hersey, founder of Nap Ministry, explores the racialized sleep gap and advocates for naps, for rest, as a form of revolutionary care and tool for liberation particularly for Black folks; see “The Nap Ministry” website: <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/about>.
- 20 Nomy Lamm interview.
- 21 Nomy Lamm interview.
- 22 Leroy F. Moore Jr. in discussion with Shayda Kafai, April 2016.
- 23 *Listen, Speak*, written by Aurora Levins Morales, performed by Antoine Hunter, San Francisco, CA, 2011. This performance reminds us of the Tuskegee experiments, a study that—without consent—gave syphilis to over 600 unknowing Black men in the United States during the 1930s.

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Methods/Theories

POSTCOLONIAL/DECOLONIAL

Post-/Anti-/Neo-/De- Colonial Theories and Visual Analysis

Alpesh Kantilal Patel

This chapter is a modest attempt to clarify and disentangle terms that are often invoked as if stable and known: “postcolonial,” “anticolonial,” “neocolonial,” and “decolonial.” How, where, and when did they develop? What differentiates them? Where do they overlap? Also, the chapter explores the following question: Given that most of these concepts were formed mainly outside of the discipline of art history, in what ways can they be marshaled toward a more ethical visual analysis? To answer these questions, each section of the chapter begins with a sketch of one of the terms in broad strokes. Once provisionally defined, I weave the concepts into a discussion of a diverse array of artworks by artists such as Walid Ra’ad, Asaud Faulwell, Emily Jacir, Gļēbs Panteļējevs and Andris Veidemanis, Quinsy and Jörgen Gario, Sam Durant, and Angela Two Stars. Their works are situated in and broadly address Lebanon, French Algeria, Palestine, Latvia and the Caribbean, and Native America. However, what follows is neither meant to cover the globe nor be a cataloging of the vast and growing literature connected to the various “colonials” I have invoked.

Colonialism is a specific form of imperialism in which a state settles territories outside its borders, thereby creating colonies. Imperialism, often confused with colonialism, is the broader dynamic that refers to any imposition of a state on an external territory, sometimes in proximity, sometimes far away. This chapter is concerned with specifically the legacies of *European* colonialism. A (very) brief history of European conquest and colonization is instructive. With the decline of the Mongol Empire (1200–1300) and the rise of the Ottoman Empire, ca. 1300–WWI (1914–1918), conventional trade with Asia was blocked; this forced Europe to seek ocean routes. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Portugal and Spain sought overseas trade routes to India and China and would claim authority over half of the planet. Eventually, Britain, the Netherlands, and France joined the Iberian nations for a five-way balance of power. During the eighteenth century, England would become the sole naval superpower, and at its peak, the British Empire would cover a quarter of Earth’s land area. The nineteenth century saw the expansion of European territory in Asia and the scramble for Africa (*Essential Humanities*; also see Lehning 2013).

During the twentieth century, European colonials were drawn into two world wars that effectively ripped Europe apart and terminated Europe’s global dominance. After WWII (1939–1945), regions conquered by Europe gradually gained independence, and it was

during this period that “postcolonial” and other terminology defining theoretical and activist movements began to take shape within Western academia. These terms did not emerge in a vacuum, though. Indeed, an important precursor to the concepts and theories I will develop is the Négritude movement, a challenge to French colonialism and racism (Rabaka 2015). The term Négritude defiantly turned the word *nègre* against the white supremacists who used it as a slur. The term is thought to have crystallized during an encounter in Paris, in the late 1920s, among three students whose experiences of Blackness were shaped in overlapping but different geographical contexts: Aimé Césaire, who was from Martinique, Léon Gontran Damas from Guiana, and Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal (Rabaka 2015). Though Césaire, credited with coining the word Négritude, would eventually become conflicted with its use, it would have a profound influence, in sometimes direct and other indirect ways, on the terminology that would develop in the post-WWII period.

I begin with a discussion of the postcolonial, which has had a sizable impact on the discipline of art history, and end with the decolonial, which has become of interest more recently to art historians. In between these, I explore the anticolonial and neocolonial. Overall, I hope this chapter will make these concepts less confusing and, in a best-case scenario, can serve as a guide that illustrates how writing about artworks alongside or with them can be generative.

Postcolonial

Most early scholarship on the “postcolonial” was brought into being by non-white US-based academics from diasporic backgrounds (all were born outside of the West) and based in English, literature, and comparative literature departments in the 1980s (for accessible and thorough introductions to postcolonial theory, see Gandhi 2020; Loomba 2005). I will focus on the work of three scholars often seen as having laid the groundwork for our understanding of the concept: Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Postcolonial studies is a field often thought to have been brought into being by Palestinian literature scholar Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978). Invoking the work of French theorist of European modernity Michel Foucault, he explored the texts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European artists and writers whose works pivoted around an idea of an imaginary other, the Orient, posed in opposition to the West/Occident (Said 1978/2014). Said writes, “[t]he Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 1978/2014, 1). Orientalism has been a key factor in European art in particular since the early nineteenth century, most especially works of art on Middle Eastern and North African subjects produced by French artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme. However, the term Orient in the European imaginary covers many countries, including a significant part of Asia. Indeed, *Orientalism* is part of a trilogy of books by Said covering a broader geography; the other books are *Questions of Palestine* (1980) and *Covering Islam* (1982). Said’s writings demanded a fresh new look at “Orientalist art,” two examples of which are the paintings *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834) by Eugène Delacroix and *Turkish Bath* (1863) by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. Both depict women in harems in problematic ways. Based largely on fantasy and projection, the women are sexualized and racialized through elaborate tableaux that present them as objects.¹ (For more on Orientalism and art, see Peltre 1998).

Indian-British US-based scholar Homi K. Bhabha explores the unequal and iniquitous power relations between the West and non-West through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. His essay “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” (1984) focused on the deep ambivalence that marked the psyches of colonizers in their relation to the colonized (Bhabha 1984). In the context of British India, he outlined the paradox of the

colonizers' interest in producing a cadre of Brown civil servants who were "almost the same [as British functionaries], but not quite" (Bhabha 1984, 125). In so doing, the British effectively created a slippage between mimicry and mockery: "mimicry is once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 1984, 127). The slippage from mimicry to mockery immediately discredits the colonizer's authorized version of otherness and profoundly undermines the colonizer's elusive self-image. The lack of a clear distinction between mimicry that reinforces subjugation and mimicry that is subversive, or between mimicry and mockery, is therefore blurry at best.

In her highly influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Indian-American scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critiques the work of historians and other scholars associated with the Subaltern Studies project in India, which had emerged in the early 1980s. In so doing, she brings gender into the conversation of the postcolonial. The "subaltern" is a category used to describe a broad range of subjects who are constructed as having little or no agency (Spivak 1988, 271–313; also see Morris 2010).² Drawing on Derridean poststructuralist and Marxist theories, Spivak argues that the project attributed a unified consciousness to non-elite groups in British India in the naïve attempt at historical recovery. She writes that it is impossible to recover their voices, especially those of female subjects. Moreover, she questions the role of Western intellectuals (invariably white and male) who speak for the Other and do not question their privilege. Worth noting is that both Spivak and Bhabha were born in India but educated in Western schools. Spivak implicates herself in this challenging situation.

Said explored the historically imbalanced relationship between the world of Islam, the Middle East, and the Orient, on the one hand, and that of European and American imperialism, on the other. The scholarship of Spivak and Bhabha focused on the period after the partition of India in 1947. Given the geographical specificity of all of their works, the question becomes: Can postcolonial as a term be used metaphorically in different situations? R. Radhakrishnan, who was born in India, suggests that a variant of the concept, postcoloniality, can. He discusses how it can function as an allegory in his essay "Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity" (1993). He writes that the term can be seen as a "relational space to be spoken for heterogeneously but relationally by diverse subaltern/ oppressed/ minority subject positions in their attempts to seek justice and reparation for centuries of unevenness and inequality" (Radhakrishnan 1993, 751). In so doing, Radhakrishnan suggests postcolonial theory can be applicable beyond those spaces focused on by Said, Bhabha, and Spivak.

While postcolonial theory was readily taken up by the Anglophone humanities more generally, it was not until the 1990s that art history followed suit. The seminal anthology *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (1990) is often seen as signaling a critical turn in the discipline of art history to acknowledge the growing scholarship on the postcolonial that had built up throughout the 1980s. Published by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, *Out There* included essays by Said, Bhabha, and Spivak. The essays meditated on "the process through which cultural margins are created, defined and enforced" (Ferguson 1990, 4).³ There are no simple reasons why postcolonial theory spread like wildfire everywhere, it seemed, except within art history. Founder of the influential journal *Third Text*, Rasheed Araeen, notes that modernity in art—as opposed to in literature—was not able to disentangle itself ideologically as easily from Rene Descartes's philosophy of (cisgender white European male) human exceptionalism that was further expanded by Hegel and Kant in the realm of aesthetics (Araeen 2000, 5). Aimé Césaire also invoked Descartes and the inherent racism in the seemingly innocuous "I think therefore I am." Seemingly echoing Araeen's point, though, the Négritude movement did find full expression in poetry and literature but less so in visual arts (Diagne 2018). Césaire did feel there was a potential for the ideas of the movement to be expressed in visual art: indeed, Césaire's friend Léopold Sédar Senghor wrote about art in the context of the Négritude movement

but his focus was on historical artifacts rather than contemporary art production (Diagne 2018). Therefore, it does not seem surprising that academic departments focused exclusively on written language embraced postcolonial theory. While art history is about language, too, it is one that is tethered to the visual arts.

In conjunction with some of the ideas I have provisionally explored here, I discuss New York City-based conceptual artist Walid Ra'ad's *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (English Version)*, a 2001 experimental documentary that partially emerges from the published books of several American men who had been kidnapped in Lebanon in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In each book, an unnamed Arab man is mentioned as being detained alongside them. Ra'ad presents a series of interviews he conducted with Souheil Bachar, who is presented as the Arab man who shared a cell with American captives. However, Bachar is played by actor Fadi Abi, who is well-known to anyone in Lebanon but not outside of it. In other words, Ra'ad ventriloquizes what appears to be Bachar's "testimony." This strategy not only troubles the false binary of fiction and nonfiction but also evokes Spivak's observation of the impossibility of ever knowing the subaltern subject.⁴ In the interview, Ra'ad articulates that while Western women's captivity revolves around the discourse of sexual assault, Western men's revolves around the threat of sexual desire for men. It is a threat that ultimately is deflected onto the non-Western other, in this case, an Arab man (Walid 2002). Bhabha's discussion of the regulation of desire is appropriate to invoke here, although he does not explicitly discuss the homoerotics of the colonizer's emasculating gaze, which has a long history in discourse related to European colonization. The homophobia of Martinican philosopher and revolutionary Frantz Fanon, for example, whom I will discuss in the next sections when I explore the anticolonial and neocolonial, could be argued to be about his anxiety about being emasculated in a white dominant culture (Vergès 1997). And, in the context of British colonialists, historian Mrinalini Sinha notes that they naturalized white supremacy through the production of "manly" Englishmen in contrast to the "unmanly" Bengali-educated men (see Sinha 1995).⁵ The construction of "manly" Englishmen can be read as implicitly further shoring up the colonizers' heterosexuality and deflecting the specter of an effectively effeminized homosexuality onto the "unmanly" Bengali-educated men. In the context of *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes*, and supposedly at the behest of Souheil Bachar, the tapes were dubbed by a female voiceover in English when screened outside the host country. Ra'ad's use of a female voiceover for a male captive keeps in play the homosocial/erotic dimensions of the captives' ordeal while seemingly avoiding settling on what the object of desire might be.

Anticolonial

Global South studies scholar J. Daniel Elham suggests that "as a philosophical movement, anticolonialism is the under-acknowledged predecessor to postcolonial theory" (Elham 2017). The term anticolonial often refers to the struggle against imperial rule during the first half of the twentieth century. It conjures up movements led by those referred to by Frantz Fanon as "les damnés de la terre" (the wretched of the earth), the title of his influential 1961 book of the same name (Fanon 1961/1976). At the same time, English literature scholar Grant Ferrad unpacks the slippage between the postcolonial and the anticolonial by drawing on C. L. R. James's classic history of the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804, *The Black Jacobins* (1938). James describes the only successful slave revolt as both an anticolonial uprising and the foundation of Haiti as a postcolonial nation and argues that these two elements are coterminous and blur together. Most recently, literature scholar Carlos Garrido Castellano has invoked the "anticolonial" in relation to art in his book *Art Activism for an Anticolonial Future* (2021). He suggests that art activists and socially engaged artists have benefited from anticolonial thinking to challenge formations of contemporary neoliberal late capitalism and chart new anticolonial futures (Castellano 2021).⁶

In this section, I will discuss the work of two artists: Iranian American Asad Faulwell and Palestinian American Emily Jacir. The former implicitly explores the anticolonial at a particular historical moment (French Algeria, 1830–1962), whereas the latter suggests how the concept of the anticolonial can be useful to consider contemporary struggles in another part of the world. Faulwell's series *Les Femmes D'Alger* (2010–2021), which includes approximately 130 paintings, is both anticolonial and feminist.⁷ In particular, the works look back on the past and bring attention to the largely unsung female freedom fighters who struggled from 1954 to 1962 to end the French occupation of the African nation. Algerian women have served as muses for artists as diverse as Eugène Delacroix, whose work I briefly touched on in the previous section, and Pablo Picasso. Faulwell is borrowing the title of his series from that of a series of paintings (1954–1955) by Picasso. However, Faulwell's work does not turn women into objects of desire or fragmented shapes as Delacroix and Picasso did. For instance, in Faulwell's painting *Les Femmes D'Alger 3* (2011), the starkly rendered black-and-white face of one of these activists, Djamila Bouhired, stares out at the viewer and dominates the canvas while thin bands of color and decorative motifs flow out from her eyes and connect to an intricately drawn background of florid shapes and patterns (Figure 24.1). The union of the somber portrait and these latter forms—reminiscent of the 1970s US-based Pattern and Decoration movement, itself heavily influenced by traditional Moroccan textiles and Persian motifs—evokes both the exuberance of life and the specter of death associated with her heroic acts. With *Les Femmes D'Alger* (2010), Faulwell depicts a three-quarter-length portrait of Zohra Drif, who was sentenced to twenty years in prison for her role in a bombing in 1957 but was eventually pardoned at the end of the war.



FIGURE 24.1 Asad Faulwell, *Les Femmes D'Alger* #3, 2011, acrylic and paper on canvas, 64 × 48 inches. Courtesy of artist.

Her strong, handsome face is rendered in a muted palette while colorful, decorative shapes and patterns cover her dress and eyes in a style evocative of Gustav Klimt's, mainly his beautifully intriguing portraits of lone women. The balance between surface and psychological depth Faulwell achieves in these pieces veers toward the purely decorative in *Danielle Minne* (2010) and *Mujahidat #11* (2011), paintings in which the portraits are entirely hidden within floral and starburst shapes. These works might serve as metaphors because these revolutionary women once seamlessly blended into the background: Fanon writes eloquently in his book *A Dying Colonialism* (1959) that these women were often called upon to plant bombs in the French sections of cities—a dangerous anticolonial act—because they could enter without detection if wearing European dress (Fanon 1959/1965).

In her 2020 practice-based MFA thesis, Palestinian exile Hudha Salah explicitly mobilized “anticolonial” rather than postcolonial because colonialism was a lived, ongoing issue for her. She explains:

[a]s someone from an actively colonized country, it is hard to talk about a postcolonial status. This term works in postcolonial countries such as Algeria or South Africa. The same cannot be said when discussing Palestine or even the land of Canada where Indigenous people continue to experience an active displacement and cultural elimination. My very own existence here today is evidence of that fact (Salha 2020, xviii).

She also invokes Edward Said, not as a postcolonialist as he is most often referred to, but as an anticolonialist.

Salah discusses how in the eighteen years since she left Gaza, she has only had one opportunity to see her mother and siblings. One of artist Emily Jacir's works, *Where We Come From* (2001–2003), implicitly addresses the issue brought up by Salah. The work is framed by Jacir, who splits her time between New York and in the Palestinian city of Ramallah, first by asking Palestinian exiles a question: “If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?” Taking advantage of her ability to move about relatively freely in Palestine/Israel with an American passport, Jacir promised to realize the desires of those forbidden entry into their homeland. In the final installation work, a series of texts in black lettering on white panels describe the various requests, and color photographs, presented by their side, document Jacir's actualization of them.

Another work by Jacir references the forced and permanent displacement of Palestinian Arabs from the entirety of the area of what is now Israel. The installation, *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages that Were Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948* (2001), features a life-size refugee tent that narrates the history of Palestinian displacement with the embroidered names of every village destroyed, depopulated, or occupied in 1948, all of which are archived in Walid Khalidi's book *All That Remains. The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (2006). Khalidi provides a comprehensive description of statistical data, maps, and photographs of the roughly 500 Palestinian villages that were destroyed or depopulated during the 1948 Al-Nakba, which translates into English as “The Catastrophe.” Jacir invited over a hundred people—including Palestinians, some of whom were from the destroyed villages, and Israelis who grew up in the villages' remains—to come to her studio and embroider with her. The memorial is accompanied by a book with a daily log, which documents all the participants in the project (Wolfe 2020).

Simply put, the subject matter of the works of Faulwell, Salah, and Jacir—despite dealing with vastly different contexts and time periods (mid-twentieth-century French Algeria and historical/contemporary Palestine)—discussed in this section all are specifically concerned with pushing back against colonial subjugation. In this way, an anticolonial conceptual framing makes more sense to mobilize than a postcolonial one, which implies chronologically a period after colonialism has officially ended. To further nuance this point, the following section engages with another related concept: the neocolonial.

Neocolonial

Fanon was fearful that the hard-fought independence of Algeria could turn into the dependence of another kind. He wrote, “[t]he apotheosis of independence is transformed into the curse of independence, and the colonial power through its immense resources of coercion condemns the young nation to regression” (Fanon 1963, 97). He was concerned that the West would seek to maintain the iniquitous international order that had made it rich and powerful, and new ruling classes in postcolonial nations would fail to devise viable systems of their own: both of these are the essence of what the term “neocolonialism” constitutes, implying a reconfigured but continued persistence of colonial power relations in these nations (for a more detailed overview of colonialism, see Afisi n.d.). Jean-Paul Sartre first invoked the term as part of his controversial book *Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism* (1964), which criticized the French government’s occupation of Algeria and supported the violent resistance of the National Liberation Front (FLN), the nationalist party in Algeria (Sartre 1964). Sartre was involved in anticolonial discourse, too: in 1961, he had written the preface for Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 1961/1976). A few years after this was published, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghanaian politician, political theorist, and revolutionary, completed his book *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, which explained that one way in which the West would continue to control its ex-colonies would be through economic means (Nkrumah 1965, ix).⁸ Nkrumah referred to neocolonialism as imperialism’s “last hideous gasp,” but at the same time as its most pernicious phase. British Commonwealth and postcolonial literature scholar Graham Huggan has provocatively suggested that the term postcolonialism, “could be argued, has arisen to *account for* neocolonialism, for continuing modes of imperialist thought and action across much of the contemporary world” (Huggan 1997, 19; emphasis in original).

In 2013 in Latvia, one of the former Eastern Bloc countries, the public art monument *Teleport* (2013) was installed in the city of Kuldīga, and I will argue that its installation can be considered a neocolonial act.⁹ It was commemorated to honor the seventeenth-century Latvian-German duke Jacob Kettler of the Duchy of Courland, a Polish-Lithuanian vassal state in an area that is today western Latvia. The monument was designed by sculptor Gļebs Pantelējevs and architect Andris Veidemanis. The sculpture’s front side, made of polished and varnished cast aluminum, represents the twenty-first century, whereas the back and sides were made from rusty cast iron, representing the seventeenth century. As critic Margaret Tali has written, “[t]he sculptural figure of Kettler seems to be stepping out of the rusted past on its back side, while he ostensibly heads to a bright future on the silvered-colored front side of the monument” (Tali 2020).

Kettler commissioned several ships to participate in the violent European project of colonial expansion and resource extraction and was a slave trader. From 1654 to 1659, he established a colony on the island of Tobago, currently part of Trinidad and Tobago, after it had been a Dutch, French, and British colony. However, this was conveniently not addressed because the public artwork is part of a larger nation-building narrative (Tali 2020). Indeed, in the National History Museum of Latvia, Kettler’s colonial conquests are interpreted as a necessity and an economic project needed to overcome the oppression of the Russian Empire. Perversely, this colonial past elevates Latvia by positioning it as a former colonial force alongside its Western European counterparts. Also, there is no mention of these unsavory aspects of Kettler in the “Live Museum-Ancient Kuldīga,” an interactive experience where actors wait in the streets to narrate the city’s history. On the one hand, the monument is an anticolonial gesture to the Russian empire, but at the same time, it is an implicitly neocolonial one in its concomitant glorification of a slave owner (Warsza and Sowa 2022). This monument is a testament to how official state-sanctioned artworks can re-write history—this is precisely the kind of fiction masquerading as fact that Said discussed and Ra’ad explored in their works.

In another example of a neocolonial act, on June 3, 2017, the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, a partnership between Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board in the United States, was set to reopen after renovations. One of the new works was *Scaffold* (2012) by Los Angeles-based artist Sam Durant. A giant structure made of steel and wood, the piece was originally created for documenta 11 in 2012 in Kassel, Germany. *Scaffold* comprises a platform of gallows with several staircases leading up to it. Durant described the work as a commentary on the death penalty. The gallows used in the sculpture represent a range of executions, beginning with John Brown in 1859 and culminating in the scaffold used in Saddam Hussein's hanging in 2006. He wrote: "There is no intention of directly equating the victims of the various executions or of making equivalencies between the activities that led to their deaths. The only consistency implied in the project is that they are all State sanctioned executions" (Regan 2017). In the center of the installation, there is a very tall wooden pole that recalls historical images of the hanging structure used in 1862 to execute thirty-eight men of the Dakota tribe who are native to the area that is now Minnesota. Approved by Abraham Lincoln, this was the largest mass execution in US history and took place roughly eighty miles south of Minneapolis in a town called Mankato.

About a month after *Scaffold* was erected, there were protests lodged by the Dakota tribe demanding that the work be taken down. For many of the Dakota people, the work triggered historical pain, especially given that the Walker sits on land once occupied by their ancestors (see Dickinson 2017).¹⁰ As Dakota media artist Mona Smith stated at the time, "[i]t's never fun to learn again and again about the successful erasure of Dakota people and Minnesota history. ... Any Dakota person would have suggested the pain triggered by this work" (Dickinson 2017). Politicians, leaders of several arts organizations, Native American artists, and tribal groups, including Minnesota's Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, roundly condemned Durant's *Scaffold*. Worth noting is that there did not seem to be much thought regarding not only the Native American context but also what was installed in proximity to *Scaffold*, more specifically, the whimsical and playful permanent sculptural installation *Spoonbridge and Cherry* (1985–1988) by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen. Next to the latter, *Scaffold*'s masking of colonial relations was made even more disturbing by the fact that it inevitably joined into the simultaneous evocation of a children's playground.

Decolonial

The term decolonial was first invoked in reference to the disentanglement of the countries of Asia and Africa from their former oppressors in the mid-twentieth century. US-based literature scholar Walter D. Mignolo notes that the decolonial in the present day is conceptualized in quite a different manner. He invokes Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's observation that modernity and coloniality are the pillars of Western civilization—one cannot exist without the other—and that "decoloniality" means to "undrape the underlying logic of all Western ... modern/colonial imperialisms" (Hoffmann and Mignolo 2017). Mignolo writes that even though decolonization led to some successes during the Cold War—some nations did become independent—there were significant failures due, mainly, to the fact that theories of decolonization did not question the structures of knowledge and subject formation (desires, beliefs, expectations) that were implanted in the colonies by the former colonizers. Moreover, Mignolo notes that decolonization had been more concerned with the state and its relationship with financial institutions. Decoloniality, on the other hand, must be concerned with how individuals are engaging in "epistemic reconstitution" in sometimes small ways that are not about the abstract yet structural power of the state (Mignolo 2021, 2; Mignolo is borrowing this phrase from Aníbal Quijano).

Mignolo argues that while postcolonialism often gets trapped by its prefix, which implies a teleological timeline as devised by the West, the concept of the decolonial understands



FIGURE 24.2 Quinsy and Jörgen Gario, *How to See the Spots of Der Leopard*, 2020, performance in front of monument to Jacob Kettler. Photography by Annemarija Gulbe. Courtesy of the artists.

time as something messier in which past, present, and future are difficult to parse out. In this context, it is worth noting that postcolonialism is largely a product of the theoretical concept of deconstruction: postcolonial theory thus aims at unraveling, but it never quite espouses rebuilding because this would risk creating yet another norm (Derrida 1981). Decoloniality, on the hand, is very much concerned with the kind of rebuilding that Mignolo outlines as tantamount to “reconstitutions, re-emergence, resurgence, re-existence” (Hoffmann and Mignolo 2017).

I return to the monument to Jacob Kettler, which I discussed in the previous section, to argue that the 2020 site-specific performance *How to See the Spots of Der Leopard* by Dutch-Caribbean artists Quinsy Gario and his brother Jörgen Gario, a musician and poet, unravels at least one buried narrative and at the same time makes visible Kettler’s colonial misdeed (Figure 24.2). This brilliant artwork, performed at the monument, is a decolonial act because it makes the mutuality of modernity and coloniality visible and operates at the corporeal body level rather than as an abstract concept: Western modernism functions by abstracting, and thus an embodied “occupation” of the site/piece is decolonial. The performance’s title was inspired by the name of Kettler’s ship *Der Leopard*. It sailed from Amsterdam to Guinea, where abducted and chained Africans were forced onto it. It then sailed to Martinique, where the artists’ ancestors were sold and enslaved to work in sugar plantations established in the French colony by Dutch people, who had previously been expelled from Brazil by the Portuguese. In this way, the artwork challenged or called into question the way most Latvians continue to look at this history by showing—through the actual bodies of the artists, descendants of the slaves involved in Kettler’s story—the connection between the country’s economic prosperity and the dehumanization of African peoples.

The performance combined spoken word with steelpan music, an instrument from the enslaved communities of Tobago, and the *kokle*, a well-known traditional Latvian folk instrument, to tell another story. The performance began with Quinsy Gario playing the *kokle* and drawing an island on the pavement as he asked his audience:

Are you nostalgic?
 Are you nostalgic for oceans and seas?
 For adventure?
 Are you nostalgic for heroes?
 Are you nostalgic for violence?
 Are you nostalgic of those who aren’t here?

Of those who left everything behind, and
 those who vanquished?
 Have you heard about Tobago?
 Tobago was not made, Tobago was claimed (Tali 2020).¹¹

While finishing the drawing of Tobago on the pavement, Jörgen Gario played the steelpan, the deep sounds of which caught the audience's full attention, and continued the spoken word part of the performance with:

Are you nostalgic about those things in which we feel comfortable?
 For those stories in which some of us were not seen as humans?
 Are you nostalgic for capital, nostalgic for market?
 We are not (Tali 2020).

Critic Margaret Tali has noted there were about eighty viewers of the performance and that "many locals" remained to see the whole event, and some approached the artists for short conversations in Kuldīga even days later. She further observes that "people's reactions were mostly puzzlement, curiosity, and sometimes unknowing for how to react to what they encountered" (Tali 2020). The conversations sometimes illustrated that the performance did not read as intended. For instance, Tali goes on to note that:

much attention went into thinking about the ways in which Gario's figure, as a man of color playing the kokle, could be interpreted. Some of the locals interpreted this in combination with the topic of nostalgia as being a supposedly Latvian legacy left behind in Tobago (Tali 2020).

At the same time, questions were also raised about museums and how to deal with stolen heritage in present-day collections (Tali 2020).

Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, a humanities scholar based in Ecuador, note that decoloniality opens up "coexisting temporalities kept hostage by the Western idea of time and the belief that there is one single temporality: Western-imagined fictional temporality"; and they continue: "This is the understanding and project of *pluriversal and interspersal decoloniality*" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 3; emphasis in original). Therefore, I would argue that *How to See the Spots of Der Leopard* is not a supplement to a narrative or an alternative story but rather part of a pluriverse that illustrates multiple temporalities exist at one time: the temporality of white-washed Latvian historical pasts rendered through a monument in the present and that of artists from formerly enslaved communities performing new versions of the past and present in the present.

I return to Sam Durant's *Scaffold* (2012), which I argued functioned as a neocolonial act. In a fascinating turn of events, Durant took responsibility for his tone-deaf artwork:

It has been my belief that white artists need to address issues of white supremacy and its institutional manifestations. ... However, your [Dakota tribe's] protests have shown me that I made a grave miscalculation in how my work can be received by those in a particular community. In focusing on my position as a white artist making work for that audience I failed to understand what the inclusion of the Dakota 38 in the sculpture could mean for Dakota people. ... I should have reached out to the Dakota community the moment I knew that the sculpture would be exhibited at the Walker Art Center in proximity to Mankato.¹²

Although certainly not capable of undoing the harm already inflicted by the work, Durant's taking of responsibility effectively began to refashion the neocolonial act into a decolonial one. In addition, Durant, working directly with Dakota elders, the Walker Art

Center, and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board members, decided to give over the copyright of his work to the Dakota tribe. In doing so, Durant and the Dakota tribe illustrated that, while cultural institutions are often blind to their relationship to settler colonialism, an erasure that the white cube mode of exhibiting art sadly tends to reinforce, there can be other ways of functioning that foreground these power relations. After acquiring the work, the Dakota tribe at first was going to burn it (after it was dismantled). In the end, the tribe decided to bury the remains of the work in recognition of tribal beliefs. As Dakota elder Ronald P. Leith explains:

[t]he wood has a spiritual nature that is inherent to itself in Lakota Dakota tradition. ... Of the four elements—fire, water, air, earth—you cannot use any of the elements in a disparaging fashion without putting yourself in a position of being disrespectful. To use fire to burn this wood that has a negative stigma attached to it—that is not allowed (Voon 2017).

In 2020, the British journal *Art History* put together a questionnaire and asked many international scholars to consider what it might mean to decolonize the discipline of art history (Grant and Rowe 2020). This was an important first step for the discipline to acknowledge that it is a colonial product. This kind of self-reflection mirrors that of Durant's response to criticism, and one hopes it leads to the kind of world-building and demand for accountability exemplified by the Gario brothers' generative, embodied artwork that evoked a pluriverse and multiple temporalities.

Coda

Given the felicitous ending to the story of Durant's work in relation to the Dakota tribe, it is especially disturbing to follow the subsequent discourse around this particular case—such attention casts light on the status of debates around the legacies of colonialism and these various theoretical terms I have traced here. Later comments reveal the stubbornness of a Western art world elite (many of whom think of themselves as progressive) who are ignorant of their neocolonial tendencies and unable to think about what the decolonial might constitute. For instance, Tom Eccles, former executive director of Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard, said:

Disposing of artworks and burning them is a pretty strong statement. ... Where do we draw the line? ... I think these are mainly well-intentioned works by well-intentioned artists that caused offense both for what they contain but more significantly who said it. Are we at a point where supposedly white privileged artists should not speak of the experiences and histories of those who are not white and privileged? I think we are (as quoted in Sheets 2017).

Eccles' statement appears to be an implicit mourning of the inability of white male artists to no longer veil their authorship. Durant is a white, privileged male. This is a fact, and the artist himself has made clear he has no problems acknowledging this and relinquishing ownership of the work. Moreover, as art critic Jillian Steinhauser points out, censorship can only be wielded by those in power—in this case, the museum or the artist (Steinhauser 2017; also see Scott 2017).¹³ Since the first Europeans colonized their territory, the Dakota people have not had any power.

The story of *Scaffold* does not end here, though, and this allows me to avoid ending this chapter on such a sour note. In 2021, a new work *Okciyapi (Help Each Other)* by Dakota artist Angela Two Stars (see Walker Art Center 2021), a member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate tribe, was unveiled on the site where the artist Durant's *Scaffold* once stood (see Figure 24.3).¹⁴ Her project was selected from over fifty proposals from the United States



FIGURE 24.3 Okciyapi, 2021, pre-cast engraved concrete, enameled metal panels, script and audio Dakota language, medicinal plants native to Minnesota, water vessel. Annemarija Gulbe.

and abroad. They were reviewed by the Walker curatorial staff and an Indigenous Public Art Selection Committee, a group of native curators, knowledge keepers, artists, and arts professionals (Espeland 2021). Constructed of pre-cast engraved concrete, enameled metal panels, script, audio of people speaking the Dakota language, and living medicinal plants native to Minnesota, the work almost looks like a maze or labyrinth from a bird's eye perspective. A water vessel in the center reminds visitors that the name "Minnesota" comes from the Dakota phrase "Mni Sota Makoce," or "the land where the water reflects the clouds" (Espeland 2021). You can hear stories by Dakota speakers on your phone as you walk through the work or sit down to contemplate. Regarding the piece's location within the garden, Two Stars said: "I specifically chose this site with the awareness that there was a need for healing, for both the community and the land itself. As part of the installation process, my family led a ground cleansing ceremony at the site, to help all of us to move forward in positivity and celebration" (see Espeland 2021).

It is helpful to invoke Māori scholar and professor of Indigenous education, Linda Tuhiwa Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou), who published her path-breaking *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* in 1999 (Smith 1999/2021). Smith's book, as she states therein, is for "researchers who work with, alongside, and for communities who have chosen to identify themselves as Indigenous" (Smith 1999/2021, 5). In the twenty years since it was published, it has had ripple effects on a broader group of race-critical, queer, and transnational feminists (see e.g. Lee and Evans 2022). In her book, Tuhiwai Smith describes how theorizing research—and artistic practice is a form of research—always involves thinking about imperialism and colonialism, given that research is regulated through formal rules of disciplines (like art history) and the institutions (museums) that support them, which are structurally Western. Two Stars' project is exemplary of Smith's call for research, especially that conducted by Indigenous populations, to be always being mindful of imperialism and colonialism. Engaging with the installation, it is, in fact, difficult to escape the force of these historical factors in relation to the Indigenous point of view. Two Stars' work nimbly occupies and negotiates the museum, a colonial product, and her heritage.

In the context of this chapter, I would add that our research as art historians should be aware of discourses connected to the postcolonial, anticolonial, neocolonial, and decolonial. As Smith notes, each case of scholarship or intellectual inquiry is different, and there is thus no way to provide a standardized toolkit of theories and methodologies (Smith 1999/2021). Indeed, this chapter is not meant to be readily adaptable to all circumstances. Still, it does provide something that is surprisingly missing for art historians just by raising the question of how these terms, despite their slipperiness, might in fact, be powerful and generative as we seek ethical modes of visual analysis and historicize visual culture.

Notes

- 1 Also worth noting is that artists, such as Ingres, and writers had never been to these parts of the world.
- 2 The term “subaltern” comes out of the empire itself, for it is a British term for a military designation. The term was carried over from the military to refer to “natives” who were designated as mid-level bureaucrats in the service of the Empire. To be effective, the subaltern had to learn the language of the colonizer and thus were forced to be slightly removed from their “native” culture.
- 3 Rasheed Araeen points out that Spivak, Bhabha, and Said were often called upon as effectively “postcolonial celebrities” by the art world. But he notes, these scholars were unable to critically engage effectively with art institutions whose agendas were often in contrast with their own radical ideas because of “their ignorance not only of the structures of these institutions [museums, etc.] and their relationship to art, but also their ignorance of the specificity of art practice and its historical and theoretical underpinnings” (Araeen 2000, 12). I have written elsewhere that Bhabha, for instance, has often been called upon to write about the work of Shahzia Sikander and that “[t]he reiterative use of the ‘celebrity economy’ of Bhabha as postcolonial scholar exemplar potentially parodies, and thus undermines, his scholarship by implying that he was called forth to legitimize Sikander’s artworks, which—to complete the perverse loop of circular logic—simultaneously reduces them to an essentialist, ‘postcolonial’ reading” (Patel 2009, 56).
- 4 Ra’ad attributed most of his work from 1989 to 2004 to the Atlas Group, a fictional foundation dedicated to researching and documenting the modern history of Lebanon, which had gained independence from France in 1943. Ra’ad was the group’s sole member, but he often referred to himself as the Atlas Group’s archivist, thereby implying there were other members. Ra’ad received his PhD in Cultural and Visual Studies at University of Rochester in the United States, where he focused on postcolonial theory. Given this focus, he is undoubtedly aware of the work of Said. A key difference between Said’s and Ra’ad’s views on history, however, is that, while for Said the construction of history comes from the West, for Ra’ad it comes from within those in power in Lebanon. In attributing agency to the Lebanese, Ra’ad emphasizes the insufficiency of the West/non-West binary.
- 5 Postcolonial scholar Sara Suleri provocatively notes that the colonial gaze was explicitly directed at the “sexual ambivalence of the effeminate male groom” rather than the “inscrutability of the Eastern bride” (see Goodyear 1992, 16).
- 6 Castellano considers how culture plays a part in the production of neoliberal reasoning. Though he does not explicitly define the term “neoliberal,” he hews closely to scholarship on the concept that builds on the foundational work of David Harvey and Frederic Jameson.
- 7 Asad Faulwell, email message to author, October 10, 2022.
- 8 Nkruman wrote that the only way to combat neocolonialism was through unity or alliances. Two of these, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Afro-Asian solidarity movement, were discussed in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. At this important meeting, representatives from twenty-nine governments of Asian and African nations gathered to discuss peace and the role of the “Third World” in the Cold War, and economic development. Both NAM and the solidary movement still exist. NAM has a membership of roughly 120 countries, none formally aligned with or against any significant power bloc. The “Third World” as a category was first coined by Alfred Sauvy, a French demographer, anthropologist, and historian to describe those countries that were neither part of WWI—the capitalist, economically developed states led by the United States—nor WWII—the communist states led by the Soviet Union. See Solarz (2012). When the term was introduced, the Third World principally consisted of the developing world, the former colonies of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is the most extensive grouping of states worldwide after the United Nations. The term “Third World,” has become increasingly problematic given it is generally invoked by those (Europeans and Americans) outside of the countries that are part of it.

- 9 The Eastern Bloc generally refers to the countries of Eastern Europe under Communism. Latvia as well as the Baltic countries Lithuania and Estonia were absorbed into the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) during WWII.
- 10 There are many reasons the work provoked such a strong negative reaction. As Sheila Dickinson notes, for instance, it was not until 2015 that the state's sixth-grade history textbooks were updated to acknowledge the forced removal of the Dakota people. Also, then-Governor Mark Dayton set up a special committee a year before *Scaffold* was installed to relocate paintings of cultural and racial superiority over the Dakota people that adorned the state capitol's Senate chambers. Despite a majority willing to see the paintings moved to a museum, only two paintings out of ten were legislatively approved to move. Additional controversy arose over talks to commemorate the bicentennial of Fort Snelling, which was established as a military base for US forces in 1820. The base was built at a sacred spiritual birthplace of the Dakota people, and it served as the site of an internment camp for Dakota women, children, and elders after the Mankato executions.
- 11 The performance details as well as the quotations throughout this paragraph are from critic Tali (2020).
- 12 Full statement by artist can be found here: "Dakota Nation Demands Removal of Sculpture at Walker Art Century," *artforum.com* (May 29, 2017), <https://www.artforum.com/news/dakota-nation-demands-removal-of-sculpture-at-walker-art-center-68759>, accessed on May 23, 2023.
- 13 In this article, she also points that Hilarie Sheets, a *New York Times* critic, and Andrea K. Scott, a *New Yorker* critic, conflate protest with censorship in their comments. Sheets (2017) writes, "did the Walker's decision to yield the work create a difficult precedent for museums?" and Scott (2017), "Should he now destroy every project about others' histories? I, for one, would hate to see a bonfire piled high with copies of Durant's book on the posters of the Black Panther Emory Douglas."
- 14 All details of the project in this paragraph come from Walker Art Center (2021).

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MARXISM/POST-MARXISM

History, Marxism, Reality, and Utopia: The Bishan Project in China (2010–2016)

Ou Ning

The Bishan Project (2010–2016) is a project of rural reconstruction and communitarian experiment that was conceived and founded by me and co-founder Zuo Jing. We chose the Bishan Village in Yi County, Anhui Province, China as the practice base, took artistic and cultural activities as the main means, intervened in the reality of countryside that was deprived and marginalized by the radical urbanization, tried to restore the complementary urban–rural relationship, advocated the importance of agricultural production, rebuilt the public life of the village, improved the participation and subjectivity of villagers, and reformed ourselves in the interaction with them. The Project absorbed the historical experience of the Rural Reconstruction Movement led by Chinese intellectuals before WWII and communitarian experiments around the world since the nineteenth century, citing Marxist anti-capitalist thought and anarchist concept of equality, to create a utopia on the rural land that would be integrated with the local people but different from the model of mainstream society.

The Bishan Project had been rooted in the countryside for six years, which has not only enlarged the visibility of rural issues in Chinese society, arousing nationwide debates, but also extended the discussion to the emergent situation in non-urban areas around the world under the upgrading capitalism. Its non-governmental nature and critical tendency to China's reality led to constant friction with the Chinese governments, and finally it was completely banned by Beijing in 2016 on the grounds of “breaking away from the leadership of the Party.” Nevertheless, the Bishan Project continued to influence the practice of rural reconstruction in China for more than a decade, and its artistic practice in rural areas was constantly revisited and reviewed (see Dreyer 2021; Nielsen 2021). Meanwhile, the study of communitarian utopia, which originated from this project, has become a long-term research project of my own, which is still going on up to now because, in my opinion, in any era, efforts to find alternatives to cope with the crises are worth studying.

Going to the People

When the Bishan Project was conceived in 2010, I was directly inspired by Y. C. James Yen's deeds of mass education and rural reconstruction (Ou 2020). From a broader historical perspective, his practices were part of the mighty trend of the Going-to-the-People Movement after WWI. When the Qing Dynasty was overthrown by the 1911 Revolution, China began to move toward becoming a republic. However, the intellectual elites who were expecting a new era found that, at the grassroots level, people in China, especially the peasants in the vast rural areas, knew nothing about republican politics, and many of them were even illiterate. This was the main reason that the mass education and rural reconstruction movements were initiated by James Yen, Tao Xingzhi, and Liang Shuming, among others.

Although the Republic of China, founded in 1912, was the first republic in East Asia, it was not only short of the population base that could understand and support this new political system but also experienced difficulties in achieving a peaceful environment for developing republicanism because of the scuffles of the warlords after the regime changed. Russia's October Revolution in 1917 quickly gave birth to the first generation of Chinese Marxists and offered a model for an alternative political path. In 1918, Li Ta-chao, known as one of the earliest Marxists in China, called the end of WWI "the victory of the subalterns" and "the victory of Bolsheviks," noting that it ultimately signified "the victory of democratism and laborism over pan-nationalism and capitalism." He appealed, "If we want to be subalterns in the world, we should be workers. Guys! Go to work!" (see Li Ta-zhao Research Association 2006, 254–256, 258–263, 307–308; translated by the author). In 1919, he appealed in another article: "Young people! Go to the countryside quickly! Start working at sunrise and stops at sunset. Dig a well to drink, plough a field to eat" (Li Ta-zhao Research Association 2006). These appeals quickly kicked off the Going-to-the-People Movement in 1920.

The slogan "Going to the People" was mainly influenced by the Russian Narodnik intellectuals, but in practice it combined the ideological resources of Russian nineteenth-century anarchist and socialist thinkers and agitators Leon Tolstoy, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, and the German philosopher of communism Karl Marx. The slogan marked what would soon become a common attitude of the new intellectuals in China at that time. No matter whether they were left-wing or liberal, whether their political beliefs were stained with Russian marks or not, they tried to downplay their elite status, bending down toward and fawning on the people. This kind of virtue orientation was consistent with the New Culture Movement, which took *La Jeunesse* ("New Youth") magazine, founded in 1915 in Shanghai, as its harbinger, introducing the concepts of "democracy" and "science" from the West, criticizing the traditional culture represented by Confucianism, opposing the classical Chinese written by the upper class, advocating the vernacular spoken by ordinary people, and promoting class equality.

These movements not only carried the enlightenment mission of intellectuals to the people but also manifested the elites' desire to learn from the people. This period, marked by the student protest that broke out on May 4, 1919 (the May Fourth Movement), and opposed the Paris Peace Conference resolution to WWI, granting Japan the concession in Shandong previously held by Germany, contributed to the awakening of modern nation-state consciousness in China, opening the exploration of various schemes and paths to transform China. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), of which Li Ta-zhao was one of founders, chose violent revolution, while the rural reconstructionists chose gradual reform. They had a common direction, which was, to attach importance to the countryside and peasants.

In the history of China, the proportion of rural to urban population has always been very high. Ten years before the end of the monarchy, in 1901, when the Guangxu New Deal was

launched, China's rural population was 384.72 million, accounting for 90.2% of the total population, and the urbanization rate was 9.8%. In 1920 of the Republican Era, the rural population was 399.73 million, accounting for 89.4%, and the urbanization rate was 10.6%, with a change of less than one percentage point (see Li and Xu 2008). In contrast, in 2010, when the Bishan Project started, China's rural population was 674,149,546, accounting for 50.32% of the total population. The urban population was 665,575,306, accounting for 49.68%, and the urbanization rate was thus close to half (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China 2011). The conditions of the moment of the founding of the Bishan Project were in this way completely different from the social problems and conditions faced by the pioneers of the Going-to-the-People Movement a century ago. The CCP, which was founded in Shanghai in 1921, chose to engage "class struggle" in the countryside to mobilize the peasants into the most reliable "revolutionary force," and then used the strategy of "encircling the cities from the countryside" to seize China's political power (Sha 2006, 180). It remained in power after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Under the leadership of the CCP, China's urbanization movement sprouted in the reform and opening-up policy in 1978, and its symbol of success was Shenzhen, the city comprising a key "Special Economic Zone" (granted more access to free market-oriented economic structures) that had originally developed from a southern fishing village. The exploration of and experiment in market economy was interrupted by the political crisis spurred by student protests in 1989, but it was quickly restarted by Deng Xiaoping in his Southern Tour in 1992, and the real estate and service industries were encouraged. As a result, the urbanization movement was carried out in coastal cities with great fanfare, spreading to inland cities after China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, and reaching its climax during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. These shifts were effects of a process of synchronization and interaction with capitalist globalization, which originated from the neoliberal policies of President Ronald Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and allowed mobile capital to cross the political "iron curtain" through which the Soviet Union had controlled large parts of Eastern Europe. When the iron curtain was torn apart at the end of the Cold War (in 1980) it left room for the entry of China, formerly known as a socialist country, into this global marketplace. Globalization perfectly synchronized with China's rising ambition thus creating the global pattern of Chinese involvement after the new millennium. At this time, most of the land and labor resources of China's rural areas were quickly absorbed by urbanization. Many peasants went to work in the cities and the rural areas became increasingly hollowed out. The land was either abandoned or became a part of the cities. It could be said that China's participation in globalization and the improvement of its urbanization rate are being obtained at the expense of rural areas, that peasants rarely share the "achievements" of urbanization. The people of the countryside have been left behind by this so-called modernization and have been marginalized as backward.

Before starting the Bishan Project, my focus as an artist was on the urbanization of China. In 2003, I filmed the experimental documentary *San Yuan Li* with Cao Fei to submit to the 50th Venice Biennale. It presented our research on an "urban village" in Guangzhou, one of the earliest cities to try out the late 1970s reform and opening-up policy, which concentrated on the typical contradictions in the early urbanization movement. When the farmland in San Yuan Li, located in the suburbs, was requisitioned for municipal and commercial construction, the village became a part of the city. The villagers who lost their farmland and were unemployed had to build multistorey houses to rent out to earn a living on their reserved homesteads. They cleverly evaded the policy of urban planning and built dwellings according to their own designs, resulting in high-density buildings and intricate streets that attracted many migrant workers and university graduates with low rents. As a result, "public security problems" appeared in the village, which was regarded by

Guangzhou government as a “cancer” of the city. *San Yuan Li* shows the dizzying contemporary vernacular style of the buildings and streets of the village with fast and intense footage. It also presents the vitality of the migrants who have struggled for their survival in the city; praising the cunning wisdom of local villagers and their efforts to retain autonomy under the pressure of the government’s severe crackdown against their community in 2002. In 2006, during the Beijing Case project sponsored by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes, in Halle, Germany, we went to film Dashilan, a declining historical community in front of Tiananmen Square in Beijing that was defined as a “slum” and demolished and reconstructed by the Beijing government before the 2008 Olympic Games. We paid attention to three families from demolished homes and handed the digital camera to a member of one of them, Zhang Jinli, so that he could record his protest process. Finally, we edited a narrative documentary *Meishi Street* based on his footage. These two documentaries about high-density poverty-stricken communities in mega cities made me realize that urban problems are closely related to rural issues, and my concern for the oppressed and deprived majority in the cities thus led me to the countryside.

Rural Reconstruction and Socially Engaged Art

In 1938, Liang Shuming and Mao Zedong engaged in an all-night debate in Yan’an about whether China’s future was reform or revolution. After the CCP came to power, Liang publicly criticized Mao in 1953 for placing too much emphasis on industrialization and neglecting the interests of the peasants who had contributed to the revolution. Given the fact that Mao had the power to determine how histories were written, it is no surprise that Liang’s view was downplayed and, in the later historical narrative of the CCP, the efforts of the rural constructionists during the Republican Era were obscured. It was not until Wen Tiejun returned in 2003 to Zhaicheng Village, where James Yen had conducted the Dingxian Experiment, and established the James Yen Rural Reconstruction Institute to start the New Rural Reconstruction Movement (NRRM) that the original Rural Reconstruction Movement (RRM) during the Republican Era came onto my radar. I started by reading the biography of James Yen, then Philip A. Kuhn’s “Rural Construction Movement” chapter in *The Cambridge History of China*, and Guy Alitto’s monograph on Liang Shuming (see Wu 1981; Kuhn 1986, 353–360; Alitto 1979). Through systematically combing through this missing history, I was inspired by their ideals and practices, and made the decision to move to the countryside; it was at this point that the Bishan Project was initiated. Differently from Mao Zedong who advocated class struggle and violent revolution, the republican rural reconstructionists started from the traditions and status quo of rural society, committed themselves to ameliorating peasants’ democratic awareness and autonomous ability through education and science, and sought to improve the productivity of agriculture by introducing and popularizing advanced technology to carry out the transformation of rural China step by step. This approach was not like the raging waves of attacking the old and embracing the new but like the gentle moisturizing of a long flowing river. At a time when the foundation of the central government in republican China was slack, warlords in various regions were decentralizing power, the countryside was out of control, and banditry was still frequent, such efforts had achieved certain results, but they could not quickly alleviate the crises that followed one after another. Their experiments in various places had been soon interrupted by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). Since then, the historical mission of Chinese intellectuals had given way from “enlightenment” since the May Fourth Movement of the 1919 student uprisings to yearning for “salvation,” and the CCP took advantage of this national crisis to successfully reverse the power balance with the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), such that they were able finally to defeat the latter in the civil war of 1945–1949.

In the era since 2000, when the CCP vigorously promoted urbanization, Wen Tiejun has continued the heritage of James Yen and Liang Shuming, drawing on two late twentieth-century theories: Egyptian-French Marxist economist Samir Amin's Dependency Theory and American Sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's World System Theory (positing the interconnectedness of all nations in the era of globalization). Wen Tiejun has demonstrated the contribution made by agriculture, rural areas, and farmers in the historical experience of China as a sovereign country in terms of "delinking," reducing the risk of participating in globalization, and coping with international financial crises such as carrying out Wen's theory of "cost transfer" for the "soft landing" to remind the ruling party not to ignore the importance of the Three Rural Issues. These post-Marxist theoretical tools helped Wen to open a new historical narrative without the outdated ideology of the CCP and exposed a set of historical facts based on the universal principles of political economics (Wen 2013; Dong and Wen 2019). The NRRM led by Wen mainly focuses on developing peasant-led organizations, promoting economic cooperation, and reviving the ecological sustainability of traditional small-scale farming. At the same time, he cares for peasants who work in cities and mobilizes citizens to participate in CSA (community-supported-agriculture) farms around cities, trying to restore the complementary relationship between urban and rural areas.

As far as ideological resources are concerned, the Bishan Project agreed with James Yen's Christian humanitarianism, Liang Shuming's Neo-Confucian theory of benevolence, and Tao Xingzhi's idea of progressive education, but I am more inclined to the anarchism that emerged from the May Fourth Movement.¹ I was also convinced by Wen's sharp analysis and profound insights into rural history and current situation, but at the practical level I relied on my own artistic resources, hoping to explore a different way of promoting rural reconstruction through artistic intervention. Therefore, I went to Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2010 to see the Land Project founded by artists Kamin Lertchaiprasert and Rirkrit Tiravanija and Niigata County, Japan in 2012 to see the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale founded by Fram Kitagawa. These two artistic practices in Asian rural areas showed me many possibilities.²

In 2010, the Italian notebook brand Moleskine invited me to participate in the exhibition *Detour* in Shanghai. I drew the "blueprint" of the Bishan Commune in a blank notebook they gave me (Figure 25.1). It included my thoughts on the reality of rural decline, the desolation of agriculture, the depopulation of villages and the atomization of peasants under radical urbanization, and my research on the republican rural reconstructionists and Wen Tiejun, together with my hope to establish an anarchist commune to conduct various architectural experiments, run various artistic activities, learn agriculture and handicrafts from the villagers, and practice communal living. This "blueprint" was quickly put into action in 2011. The first Bishan Harvestival invited twenty-five contemporary artists, designers, architects, musicians, and writers to Bishan village for field investigation. Participants worked with the local craftsmen on new projects for the first exhibition, which was held in the old grain station and the old ancestral temple in the village. A series of film screenings, folk concerts, local opera performances, farmer markets, seminars, and poetry classes for children were also held. Attracted by these events, the local government invited me and Zuo Jing, another initiator of the Bishan Project, to be the curators of the 2012 Yixian Photography Festival. We changed the orientation and style of this official photography festival—which had been held six times and had previously aimed to promote local tourist attractions—turning it into an international exhibition inspired by critical thinking. We invited forty artists from all over the world and arranged exhibitions at ten venues in five villages, criticizing excessive urbanization and exploring rural reconstruction with documentary and experimental visual works. Unfortunately, the opening date collided with the 18th National Congress of the CCP, in which Xi Jinping was elected as the general secretary and was thus able to consolidate his power. Some politically sensitive works were then censored, and the festival was banned by the CCP in Beijing on the day before the opening.

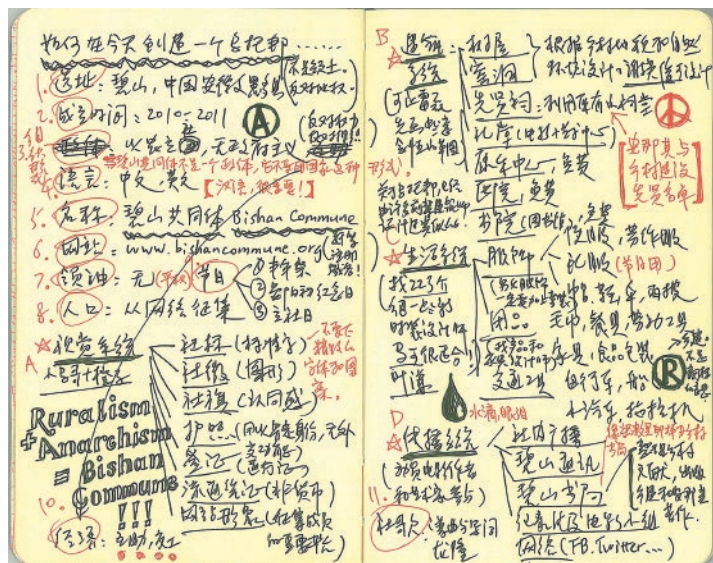


FIGURE 25.1 Ou Ning, *Bishan Commune: How to Start Your Own Utopia*, 2010, Moleskine sketchbook, 108 pages (13 × 21 centimeters), heavy acid-free paper. Courtesy of Moleskine Foundation.

Although the festival was censored for political reasons, its suspension also made me reflect on the limitations of “Festivalism.”³ The carnival-style art activities of arts festivals may enhance the popularity of a place and attract tourists; however, it is not usual in rural areas to have such an intense flow of people for several days. The excitement should not be limited to festivals, more public events should be organized and curated regularly in village daily. I decided to move from Beijing to Bishan in 2013, where I settled at the Buffalo Institute, which had been converted from an old house that had been vacant for many years. In 2014, I persuaded the Librairie Avant-Garde in Nanjing to open the Bishan Bookstore in the village; and in 2015, I renovated an old, collapsed ancestral temple into the School of Tillers. These were public spaces that were open to villagers and outsiders and helped villagers sell their agricultural products and handicrafts. Various small reading activities, art exhibitions, film screenings, and second-hand markets were arranged on different dates throughout the year, making them a part of daily village life. The site of Bishan Bookstore was originally that of another ancestral temple, a protected historical building managed by the county government. The property rights are collectively owned by villagers, but these had not been activated and used. After my consultation with them and the county government, both the villagers and the government agreed to lend the rights to the Librairie Avant-Garde for free to establish the bookstore.

This project was a bit like the Teatro Valle in Rome, an eighteenth-century historical building near the Pantheon. Due to the global financial crisis, the municipal government of Rome wanted to privatize it when it was unable to continue operating, but a group of so-called *Trenta-Quaranta* (thirty to forty years old) activists occupied the building in 2011 and, by using it to organize various cultural and political activities, they turned it into what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called a “New Commons,” thus breaking the traditional government-managed public property system (Hardt and Negri 2009).⁴

Another example is Fristaden Christiania in Copenhagen, which is an anarchist commune born out of the 1971 Squatters Movement. From 1975, the community were forced to engage with the municipal government of Copenhagen, which was pressuring them toward “legalization.” The two sides had carried out legal proceedings many times, but in 2011 the Danish government claimed rights to the land and demanded the community purchase it

outright. The community was sentenced to pay a huge amount of money, otherwise the land would be auctioned. The Christiania people then adopted crowdfunding measures such as “People Shares” in an international fundraising effort and were able to purchase a small proportion of the original acreage; the government has since asserted Danish law superseding what had been called “Christiana Law” (Ou 2014). Both these examples could be seen as the continuation of the nineteenth-century debate between Marx and Bakunin (Dolgoft 1979). The former advocated the political role of the state, government, and political parties, while the latter opposed the oppression of individual freedom by political agents. In contrast to the confrontational radical actions underlying the formations of Valle Theater or Fristaden Christiania, Bishan Bookstore was the result of peaceful consultation and free agreement among multiple parties. As the first influential rural bookstore in China, its model has been continuously copied and imitated in various places.⁵

As noted, for the Bishan Project, the Buffalo Institute was my living and working base, while the School of Tillers was to develop into an unofficial community center (Figure 25.2). I saw from David Graeber’s book *Debt: The First 5000 Years* that he regarded the agrarian philosophy school Nongjia in the pre-Qin period of China as a pioneer of anarchism, so I used the English translation of Nongjia in the book, “the School of the Tillers,” as the name of this public space (Graeber 2012, 237; Graham 1979). Huizhou, where Bishan is located, is famous for Hui-style vernacular buildings left over from the Ming and Qing Dynasties (from the fourteenth to twentieth centuries). Influenced by two poet friends, Han Yu and Zheng Xiaoguang, who took root here before me, I began to study Hui-style architecture in relation to the renovation for the Buffalo Institute and the School of Tillers to explore the historical preservation of the village. I also cooperated with the villagers and, by using local bamboo as materials without any electric power or modern tools, just like the hippies in the Back-to-the-Land Movement, I carried out the completion of a specially shaped pavilion that was built entirely by hand as an experiment in the mountains.

From the very beginning, the Bishan Project had devoted itself to the research of local history and customs. For example, my collaborator Zuo Jing led his students at Anhui University to conduct a three-year field survey of traditional handicrafts in various villages in Yi County using the methods of historical anthropology, and he followed up by publishing the book *Handicraft in Yi County* (Zuo 2014). The Bishan Bookstore and School of Tillers had unearthed many elderly villagers with special interests and talents, providing them with job opportunities, holding exhibitions for them, or publishing their paintings,



FIGURE 25.2 The villagers came to the School of Tiller for the film screening. Photo by Zhu Rui, 2015.

photographs, and hand-made works to highlight their creativity. I continued to invite artists to Bishan to carry out more in-depth research and creation, to practice socially engaged art, and to hold exhibitions. At the same time, I recruited young volunteers from different places, all of whom communally lived at the Buffalo Institute and participated in the public life of the village. I organized what I call “Bishan Hours,”⁶ in an effort to use it as a community currency for labor time record and exchange of essentials. I also designed what I call the “Bishan Passport” and produced the “Bishan Dress” to shape my imagination of a communitarian utopia that would be enduringly rooted in the countryside.^{7, 8} This kind of utopian imagination was driven by my sense of adventure and desire to go further with the Bishan Project. In the framework of China’s *realpolitik*, this was the cross-border part of the Project, just like a dangerous object that will eventually catch fire or explode. It was this incendiary visibility that finally led to the end of the Project.

Communitarian Experiment and Utopian Practice

My interest in communitarianism originated from my participation in China’s avant-garde poetry movement in the 1980s. At that time, young poets could not publish their works in official journals, so we founded our own societies and published underground magazines, forming a nationwide non-official network. When I encountered anarchism through music activities in the 1990s, my interest in literati societies turned to utopian communities like Fristaden Christiania in Copenhagen, as noted earlier. In the Bishan Project, if rural reconstruction was realistic concern, then communitarian experimentation was a latent dream. With the launch of the Project, the scope of my search for historical experiences and ideological resources was also growing. To this end, I went to New Zealand in 2013 to study different types of intentionally formed collective communities there. I worked as a resident researcher in Fristaden Christiania in 2014 and traveled to Nimbin, Australia in 2015 to study the ecological villages that evolved from the hippie communes there in the 1970s.

When I had just finished writing and publishing the studies I developed from those experiences but had not yet had time to apply the ideas and methods I learned to the Bishan Project, Beijing ordered the local government in 2016 to ban the Project forever. I was forced to leave Bishan, and I escaped to New York. Fortunately, in that academic year when I had a teaching job at Columbia University, not only did I see the most comprehensive archives donated by James Yen about his practices of rural reconstruction in China and the Philippines in the Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts but I also had the opportunity to visit the historical sites of nineteenth-century utopian communities such as Oneida in upstate New York, Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill in Kentucky, and New Harmony in Indiana. Moreover, in 2017, I went to the historical site of Robert Owen’s New Lanark mills in Scotland and, in 2018, I visited England to study the Dartington Experiment led by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst from the 1920s. In 2019, I decided to transform this fieldwork research and the experience derived from the Bishan Project into a new book, *Utopian Field*. For the book, I continued to do fieldwork, traveling to Boston to investigate Brook Farm, which was founded by the transcendentalists as a communal living experiment under Fourierist ideas in the nineteenth century. I also visited Japan to complete field and bibliographic research on the Japanese writer Saneatsu Mushanokōji’s Atarashiki-mura (New Village) Movement and other agritopian experiments from the early twentieth century. Despite the difficulty of its abrupt termination, the Bishan Project left me the legacy of experience to pursue this research project. I regard this as its reward.

This hands-on and bibliographic research into utopian studies led me to the origin of Marxism. In the nineteenth century, the utopian communities in the United States were mostly founded by separatists who wanted to escape religious persecution in Europe. Their practice of establishing rules of common property in the New World was based on

the collectivism arrangement extended from the primitive church in the first century CE that was recorded in the Bible in the book of the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles (2:44–45): “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” Therefore, it can be said that Jesus was one of the earliest communists, the source of pre-Marxist communism, older than that of Thomas More’s 1511 *Utopia*, which was one of the other inspirations for the large-scale religious utopian experiments in the nineteenth-century United States. These experiments became the earliest concrete evidence for Friedrich Engels and Marx’s later “scientific socialism.”⁹ In an 1844 article, Engels thus mentioned the Shaker villages of Pleasant Hill and New Lebanon, the settlements Harmony and Economic founded by Rappites, the Zoar community, and the Brook Farm, among others, citing the fact that travelers to these places documented how people lived a rich, harmonious life in these places where common property was adopted; refuting the opposition, who argued that socialism or communism couldn’t be put into practice (Engels 1844/2010, 215). Interestingly, I found that Li Ta-zhao also knew of these utopian communities. In 1920, he published two articles, “The Religious New Village Movement in America” and “The Bio of Robert Owen and His New Village Movement”(China Li Ta-zhao Research Association 2006). These writings were to broaden the international vision of Chinese readers in relation to the “New Village Fever” formed after Mushanokōji’s practice of Atarashiki-mura was introduced into China during the May Fourth Movement. However, just as Engels and Marx later denied utopian theories and moved toward scientific socialism, Li also bid farewell to the model of “reclusive” communitarian utopia and turned to activism in the secular world until he became a Marxist revolutionary and was sentenced to death by hanging in 1927.

But the interest in utopian communities is still active. Before and after Donald Trump won the election in 2016, several new books on the nineteenth-century utopian practices were published in the United States.¹⁰ In 2017, the influential Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman published his last book before his death—entitled *Retrotopia* (Bauman 2017)—and some new studies on Universal Basic Income (UBI) came out around the same time from Europe (see Bregman 2016; Van Parijs and Vanderbroght 2017). It showed that with the rise of right-wing forces around the world and the new crisis of capitalism, people were rethinking the possibilities and legacies of pre-Marxist communism and Marxism—such as the ideas of common property, co-living, and equal distribution—in dealing with the problems of the times.

Reading the classic works of Marx and Engels helps us understand Marxism in new ways. Marx’s analysis of the British Enclosure Movement and primitive accumulation in *Capital*, Volume One (1887), is still applicable to the interpretation of rural/urban problems and to discourses critical of the urbanization movement in contemporary China (see Marx 1976, 873–943). Drawing on Marx’s insight, we could say that, if rural land was eaten up by sheep in Britain in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (prompting, in reaction, resistance to enclosure), then it was the selling of private real estate that allowed for the annexation of rural land to urban areas in contemporary China. In the British Industrial Revolution, the peasants who lost their land flooded into cities and became vagrants, who were, in turn, regarded as the “root cause” of urban crimes, thus aggravating their marginalization and the severity of their punishment. Similarly, to clean up or even eradicate “urban villages” and “slums,” Chinese cities blamed social disorder on them. In fact, it was just as Thomas More wrote in 1516: “first make thieves and then punish them” (More 1516/1901, 24). The farms in Britain became fenced-off pastures owned by the rich, and the suburban land in China became middle-class gated communities with the same result: farmers were deprived of their means of production and then forced into the industrial labor market. The difference would be that British farmers became weavers in then expanding textile mills, while Chinese farmers became construction workers or engaged in the most tiring and dirty

jobs in cities. A Marxist analysis allows us to see that both industrialization and urbanization required the concentration and transformation of rural land, as well as the mobility of rural laborers. In this way, both the pre-industrial Open-Field System of cooperation and co-farming in rural England and the tradition of *jiaogong* (labor exchange) and mutual aid in rural China were swept by the torrent of industrialization and urbanization, and farmers had to join in the fierce competition for urban work.

Although China still maintains the ideological rhetoric of Marxism and the political facade that it is a “people’s democratic dictatorship led by the working class, based on the alliance of workers and peasants,” its essence has changed from that of a socialist country in the past to an authoritarian capitalist country in the twenty-first century.¹¹ The CCP is best at altering classical Marxist theory to meet the needs of China’s current state. Just as it changed the concept of “proletariat,” which in Marx’s theory applied to workers as the main body, by applying it to peasants, who comprised the largest population in China during the revolutionary period, it also put forth the reform and opening-up initiatives in 1978. In the same way, China has more recently been able to accommodate many of the structures of capitalism and the market economy, merging these into what Deng Xiaoping called “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” Arguably, in this way China has been able to elevate the “Belt and Road” initiative,¹² which aims to lay out geopolitics and compete with the United States for global hegemony, based on “Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind.”¹³

Regarding peasants, Marx had a famous metaphor:

The small-holding peasants form an enormous mass whose members live in similar conditions but without entering manifold relations with each other. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse ... Thus the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homonymous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes (Marx 1959, 338).

This metaphor was used to describe French peasantry, but it is now a widely spread concept in China. It has been misappropriated by the right wing such that it has become a way to summarize the supposedly selfish, indifferent, and fragmented characteristics of Chinese peasantry, and has even become a discriminatory discourse. Those who promote this idea believe that peasantry has the potential neither to understand democracy and modern politics nor to become a force for change. These so-called “shortcomings” of peasantry, however, were found to be parts of a kind of disguise in the study of Southeast Asian peasantry by James C. Scott. To safeguard their own interests, the peasants did not confront the powerful ruling forces head-on but engaged in passive modes of resistance through lazy, slack, and uncooperative ways. This “cunning” was called the “weapon of the weak” by Scott (1985). James Yen also attached great importance to the positive role of peasantry. He regarded peasantry as possessing wisdom as a kind of “brain mine” with unlimited potential that can be tapped. Therefore, he encouraged peasants to “eliminate illiteracy and become new people” through mass education campaigns.¹⁴ This kind of understanding and expectation of the peasantry’s imagination and role as “new people” originally came from the nationalist manifesto by Liang Ch’i-ch’ao, a reformer in the late Qing Dynasty: “The so-called ‘new people’ does not mean we want our people to abandon their old ways and obey others. The meaning of ‘new’ should be, first, to forge what they have and make them new; second, to supplement what they don’t have and make them new” (Liang 1999, 656).

Differently from Yen’s and Liang’s scheme of combining the new and the old, the CCP armed the peasants with Marxism, encouraged them to abandon all their old “Feudalist” ideas, and developed the model of their agency as the “creators of history” on this basis. However, the concept of “People” in the rubric and ideology of the CCP has always been abstract. It is not a concrete group of flesh-and-blood people, but an anonymous group who will always be represented by the Party. Under such a framework, the party is the political

agent of the people, and the people are the revolutionary tools of the party. In fact, their actual subjectivity is absent. Henri Lefebvre once pointed out soberly: “The (revolutionary) potentials of the peasantry were exhausted after having reached their peak in China. With Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, they made a final effort, which generated hope when it was already too late” (Lefebvre 2022, 4–5). After the success of the revolution in China, he goes on to argue, Marxism has become “an institution, a teaching, a pedagogy, a political ideology, a prevailing system”; the peasants are now ignored, just as his research on agrarian questions in the 1950s was disregarded by the French Communist Party (Lefebvre 2022, 4–5).

For these reasons, the rural reconstruction practice of the Bishan Project had to deal with the issue of the peasantry; at the same time it also paid attention to the communitarian experiment, which was often criticized by the idiom as “a small group of people’s self-satisfaction.” It seemed to repeat the conflict between “reclusive” and “secular” worlds that Li Ta-zhao faced in his early days, and I think reconciling this conflict was the worthiest and most challenging work of the Bishan Project. There is no option of revolution in contemporary China. If the elites coming from outside can create a small-scale intentional community as a model together with local villagers, it will be a gradual social improvement project to inspire other people and other regions to follow.

Final Thoughts

In a pragmatic society, utopia is often equated with fantasy and naïveté, so people often avoid talking about it. I never cared about being called a “utopianist.” For me, it is necessary to discuss utopia in any era, and the action to realize a utopia requires commendable courage. An era that is ashamed to talk about and dare not practice utopian ideas is a pity: it is either an era when all are silenced, or one in which everybody is disciplined by materialism and consumerism into self-gratification and thus stop imagining other possibilities. Oscar Wilde once said, “[a] map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at” (Wilde 1891, 292), and that was in the nineteenth century, an era when the seeds of the most radical and bold ideas could take root and grow into big trees somewhere.

What I am interested in is not a utopia on the national scale but the small-scale communitarian practice. Because of its small scale, it is possible for everyone to live and work together without having to embrace state power. It is often stated that the era of the Internet is the moment of greatest progress for mankind. However, it can’t compare with the nineteenth century in terms of promoting the diversity of human life and broadening the political imagination. Today’s Internet does not promote a borderless perfect society as we originally expected. With its development, its boundaries, barriers, and distinctions have emerged, revealing that geopolitics also exist in the online world, merging in toxic ways with consumerism, individualism, and fragmentation: online shopping puts everything at the consumer’s fingertips; people increasingly stay at home and become isolated *otaku* (the common Japanese term for Internet-obsessed). What social media provides is only a kind of network of weak ties, which is at most a community based on shared hobbies or a cocoon of information, and is far from a community with roots in a physical space and strong ties of mutual solidarity. The experience of “place” is disappearing, not only because the Internet has robbed people of communing in physical space but also because the mobility pursued by globalization has diluted the specificity of different places, and the world has become more and more similar and homogenous everywhere. Can we still get the sense of place back? Can we rebuild strong interpersonal ties? These seem like utopian questions.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a far-reaching crisis, but it may be an opportunity to practice utopia. Crises are always the catalysts of utopia. If there had been no humanitarian disasters caused by the Industrial Revolution in eighteenth-century England, the Shakers would not have crossed the Atlantic to the New World to create their “heaven on earth,” and Robert

Owen would not have developed the experiments of New Lanark and New Harmony. Had it not been for economic crises such as the Panic of 1837, the Transcendentalists in Boston would not have thought of going into the wilderness to found Brook Farm; without the Vietnam War, there would have been no Back-to-the-land Movement among American hippies. The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the mobility of goods and people on which globalization relies, and people must rethink the old Chinese saying 安土重迁, “Do not leave a place where you have lived long.” We might call this trend the “Local Turn,” marking this historic moment. In this moment, potentially, communities that are distributed, decentralized, low-cost, nature-friendly, cooperative, and mutual aid-based will become an alternative option for people, whether it is due to the needs created by the pandemic or a reaction to some of the downsides of globalization. The Bishan Project, which started thinking, exploring, and practicing these ideas more than ten years ago, might be exemplary of this possibility.

Over the past thirty years, I have witnessed the international art world gradually moving away from the social field of fierce conflict toward being absorbed into the framework of global capitalism and becoming a production line of “useless” and “baseless” aesthetic products circulated by the neoliberal market and financial system, which only produces market value without contributing to social value. I am deeply disappointed with this system. This is the main reason that I left the “prosperous” art world in the densely populated mega cities and went to the countryside to embrace its difficulties and to explore alternative solutions with art practices. Ten years later, the issue of rural reconstruction promoted by the Bishan Project has become a trend under the Chinese government’s policies of “Building a New Socialist Countryside” (Wang 2023) and “Poverty Alleviation” (State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China 2021). But in truth, these policies are devised not so much to empower rural people but rather to let capital enter the countryside to develop large-scale industrialized agriculture, revitalize rural tourism resources to serve urban consumers, alleviate the urban–rural inequality and contradictions caused by radical urbanization, and transform the financial crisis affected by the globalization.

Given this picture, it is hopeful that the Bishan Project’s experimental development of communitarianism in addition to my own research and writing on this topic have attracted some young people. I see that some of them have started co-living experiments in different parts of China, and some of these experiments have been extended to other countries with their study and/or moving abroad. Perhaps they could be regarded as part of the “multitude” described by political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004). As “multitude,” they have surpassed the “people” or “citizens” anchored on the foundation of nation states and may become the core of new energies that emerge from the post-COVID-19 era and flow in different parts of the world.

Notes

- 1 To learn more about Yen, Liang, and Tao’s thoughts, see: Buck (1984); Liang and Alitto (2013); Tao (2021).
- 2 To learn more about the Land Project and the Echigo Tsumari Art Triennial, please visit: <https://www.thelandfoundation.org>; <https://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/en>.
- 3 “To inject new energy into a dying society or save a declining place, people believe in FESTIVALISM, a popular strategy of city regeneration and rural reconstruction. Festivals of art, film, music, dance, food, beer, folk totem, traditional ritual, themed parade ... break routines and create a collective sense of belonging, an almost religious-like moment. A carnival of several days may engage local people and attract tourists. It may result in capital inflows and lead to the gentrification of the place, but FESTIVALISM is not a panacea for long-term economic revival or cultural revitalization. An exciting wave is not the same thing as a long flowing river. The short-lived passion is not enough to sustain your everyday life. To make a good place needs long-term daily efforts.” (Ou Ning, a personal correspondence in Moreschi et al. 2021).

- 4 I visited Teatro Valle and met Vincenzo Ostuni, the poet of the *Trenta-Quaranta* group for a private conversation in 2012. To learn more about “Teatro Valle Occupato,” please visit: www.teatrovalleoccupato.it.
- 5 After the opening of the Bishan Bookstore in 2014, Librairie Avant-Garde opened more rural bookstores in different provinces with the invitations and supports by the local governments: Yunxi Library in Tonglu County, Zhejiang Province, 2015; Chenjiapu Bookstore in Songyang County, Zhejiang Province, 2018; Xiadi Paddy Field Bookstore in Pingnan County, Fujian Province, 2020; and Shaxi Bai Ethnic Bookstore in Jianchuan County, Yunnan Province, 2020. The large chain bookstore Fangsuo also opened a rural branch in Dananpo Village, Xiuwu County, Henan Province in 2020.
- 6 The “Bishan Hours” was an internal currency conceived by Ou Ning, designed by Xiaoma and Chengzi, once used in the exhibition *Cloud of Unknowing: A City of Seven Streets* in Taipei Fine Arts Museum for the volunteers in 2014.
- 7 The guidebook of 2011 Yixian Photography Festival was designed as a passport format, which was named “Bishan Passport.”
- 8 The “Bishan Dress” was conceived by Ou Ning in 2010, designed and produced by Gu Xuechen and Li Xuemei in 2015, as a project “Back to the Land: Agritopia Dress for Bishan Commune” to focus on the relationship between body, garment, and the land, and as a part of the retrospective exhibition of the Bishan Project in Florence National Library organized by Polimoda.
- 9 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon invented the term in 1840, and Engels and Marx extended it in their 1844 book *The Holy Family*.
- 10 The following books were published in 2016: Reece (2016); Jennings (2016); Wayland-Smith (2016).
- 11 This phrase is quoted from the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (2018), Chapter I, Article 1. The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 20 November 2019. https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/lawsregulations/201911/20/content_WS5ed8856ec6d0b3f0e9499913.html.
- 12 The Belt and Road Initiative is a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013 to invest in nearly seventy countries and international organizations. It is considered a centerpiece of the Chinese paramount leader Xi Jinping’s foreign policy. “Belt” is short for the Silk Road Economic Belt; “Road” is short for the twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road; The Belt and Road run through Asia, Europe, and Africa, connecting the vibrant Asian economic circle at one end and developed Europe at the other. See: *People’s Daily* (2016).
- 13 This is a political slogan used by the CCP to express its aim of creating a new framework of international relations which would promote and improve global governance. “Xi urges BRICS countries to advance building of community with shared future for mankind,” Xinhua News Agency, 9 September 2021. Available at: http://www.news.cn/english/2021-09/09/c_1310178476.htm.
- 14 See James Yen’s speech at a reception for Chengdu alumni of the China Institute of Rural Reconstruction (1985), in Song (2013, 519).

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CRITICAL RACE THEORY

“The Blast Work”: Situating Critical Race Theory in Contemporary Art and Curatorial Practice

Kelli Morgan in Dialogue with Amelia Jones

AGJ: *I'd love to start by asking you about Critical Race Theory [CRT] in particular. How did you first come into contact with it? Can you define what this term means to you?*¹

KM: I often describe myself as a *critical race cultural historian*. Meaning, I'm a scholar-curator that specializes in applying critical race theory (CRT) and related theoretical frameworks to American visual culture. I was introduced to CRT in my graduate study at University of Massachusetts [UMass] at Amherst. I subscribe to Kimberlé Crenshaw's explanation that CRT is based on the premise that race is socially constructed, but both race and racism are made *real* through social constructions, and the legal policies that define and substantiate those constructs.²

CRT is directly related to my work because I apply it to American visual culture specifically to illuminate and to elucidate how American art and visual culture were crafted and designed, then subsequently interpreted and exhibited to maintain white supremacy. I very deliberately approach historic American art to reveal how it was used to construct whiteness, and I often approach BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] visual art and culture to demonstrate how it often communicates cultural phenomena that have absolutely nothing to do with whiteness.

I think CRT is imperative to the visual arts because so much of the visual arts, art history, and museum practice has been used to construct whiteness and to interrogate it. I think scholars like bell hooks are definitely a part of the discourse. I use her work a lot in my own. For example, learning from Porchia Moore, I use hooks's *Teaching to Transgress* as an entry point to teach museum professionals how to develop practices of care and how to think about curating as a mode to freedom.³

AGJ: *Can you discuss the relationship among different theoretical discourses addressing difference and exclusion, including: critical race theory, anti-racist theory, postcolonial theory, (Black) performance studies, and Black studies in general and explore how these connect (or not) to art history and curatorial studies?*

KM: Currently [at Tufts University, as Director of the Curatorial Studies program], I'm teaching a mash-up of curatorial studies and art history with scholars like W. E. B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Walter Rodney, and Angela Davis. This combination blends CRT with Black feminism and postcolonial theory to give students an alternative look at art history, museums, and museum practice that centers Western colonization and imperialism. Because each of these theoretical discourses addresses difference and exclusion by demonstrating how colonization, capitalism, and patriarchy function together to maintain white cultural hegemony, they provide a vital lens through which to approach the study of art history and the museum. Mainly because studying both through these frameworks allows students to see exactly how art history and art museums contribute to larger discriminatory systems and the cultural roles that they play within each system.

AGJ: *Kelli, I have watched some impressive YouTube videos of you lecturing about your relationship to curating and the art world in general. In one of those, you state: "Although I am an Americanist, I am a Black woman from Detroit. This is my worldview. My curatorial philosophy is rooted in a working-class, womanist value system, which does not uphold white patriarchy as a standard of universality or excellence" (Morgan 2020). In light of that statement, can you situate your work and commitment to CRT in relation to conventional (white-dominant) art history and museum/gallery structures and policies in the United States? First, maybe you could describe your training and how you came to curatorial work.*

KM: I went to Wayne State as an undergrad, a PWI [predominantly white institution] for the most part, a commuter school in the heart of Detroit. I was an Africana Studies major—I didn't think much about the fact that the majority of my professors were Black and so helpful and wonderful. I went to graduate school, same thing, PWI at UMass, studying Afro-American Studies; the faculty were super supportive, wonderful. These were two departments focused on Black culture whose curriculums are grounded in history, political science, and activism. And then I get out in the field—I got a lot of support from my colleagues at the Birmingham Museum of Art [BMA], but once I got to Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields [IMA], I learned that the support I had received as a student was not typical for emerging curators.⁴ Around that time, I started teaching bell hooks's work and took note of the way that she chronicles her education—I realized I had a similar experience: I went to school in a Black city, went to all Black schools, lived in a Black community, and it coalesced for me in May of 2020 as I was coming to grips with the fact that I was going to have to resign publicly from IMA. I didn't want to, but the situation with [museum president] Charles Venable got so bad, I thought, "You have to say something, Kelli."⁵ I was nervous; would I be able to work again? Would I be able to get a job, be it academic or curatorial? But I said to myself: "Kelli, you've had a different world view the whole time—because of this unique positionality, disruption is the work." So, talking to myself, I thought maybe I was never supposed to do the usual monographic exhibition. Structural change was always my goal—what better way to enact structural change than to blow these institutions up, to be honest? I call it the blast work, when you're just doing the explosive [...] work, so the next generation can pave the new road. It just clicked.

Of course this is the work I'm doing. As noted, I was raised in a predominantly Black community, went to predominantly Black schools (until high school), and worked and played in Detroit, a predominantly Black city. Therefore, I had no value of whiteness, nor was I taught or socialized to subordinate myself to white people. My whole world was Black and full of Black excellence well before I began studying African diasporic histories and cultures. My entire value system and worldview was informed by Black life, not white oppression. I was never really socialized to value whiteness, especially

above Black community, Black culture, Black autonomy. I didn't have that "sit down and shut up, the white guy's talking" idea. I didn't have that lens whatsoever.

AGJ: *Can you say more about how you became a curator after this experience growing up and training in Black studies?*

KM: A friend recently asked me, "How did you come to curate in large museums?" I said, "I have no idea!" In 2012, I was a teaching assistant for an Afro-American literature survey course. Because I'm so interested in visual art, I was using African American visual art to illustrate certain concepts in Toni Morrison and other texts, putting them in conversation with paintings and sculptures from the same era. The students loved this—it made the concepts more tangible. But I could also see the frustration because they couldn't see the objects up close. For example, we were reading Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, I was using Aaron Douglas's *An Idyll of the Deep South* from his "Aspects of Negro Life" series (Figure 26.1) and there's an image of a lynching, really faint in the top left-hand corner, the students asked, "What is that? I kind of see it and kind of don't." We needed to see the actual work. The classroom was too limiting—I needed a bigger space. I needed a museum gallery. But I had no idea about how to be a museum curator. I applied for a summer seminar at the American Antiquarian Society [AAS] on Civil War visual culture and I got it. And when I got to Worcester in June, lo and behold, many of the instructors who were teaching the classes were curators. I just asked a few of them: "How does one become a curator?" Georgia Barnhill [curator at the AAS] and Nan Goldin advised me to look for curatorial assistant positions once I got back to school.

I returned to school but my father got sick and I had to go to Detroit to take care of him. When I got back from taking care of Dad, my public history professor David Glassberg said, "You know Kelli, I'm on this review committee for an exhibition"—this is how the universe works!—"for contemporary artists in conversation with W. E. B. Du Bois's philosophy," because UMass has Du Bois's papers, "for the university museum." I said, "The university doesn't have a museum." He said, "I assure you it does!" Amelia, I had been at UMass for two years and I had no idea [about the University Museum of Contemporary Art (UMCA)]. The curator and director of UMCA were very familiar with contemporary art but not with Du Bois's philosophy. The faculty committee knew a lot about Du Bois but not about art. So, one of those faculty recommended me.

I put the question out there in 2012 and then the opportunities just started to show up for me! For example, Jefferson Pender was one of the artists in the UMCA show—the



FIGURE 26.1 Aaron Douglas, *An Idyll of the Deep South* from his "Aspects of Negro Life" series, 1934, at the Schomburg Center, New York. Everett Collection Inc / Alamy Images.

name of the show was *Du Bois and Our Time*—he was also artist in residence at that time, September 2013. I went to dinner with Horace Ballard and he too was a graduate student at the time doing research in the Du Bois papers. We go to dinner and Jefferson's asking us what we do—I told him, and after dinner he said, "I'm working on a project at the BMA and there's a fellowship position I think you'd be really good for." I started interviewing in November and got that job.

It's been very serendipitous. I'm very spiritual: this was work I was led to. This was not something I had sought out, or to be an art's professional period.

AGJ: *Amazing story. We can be so grateful that we have this older generation of scholars and curators supportive of such work because—speaking from experience—these fields were until recently totally white in terms of art historians and curators. All the assumptions in art history and museum curating are structurally Eurocentric and white. It makes sense—why would anyone who had studied African American studies think to go into the art world, this place of white dominance, which would hardly be supportive of someone like yourself coming from a totally different cultural viewpoint?*

KM: That was the other thing, Amelia. I was very naïve in that way, thinking everyone would be supportive. At Birmingham, Graham Boettcher, who's now the director, he was the curator of American Art, and Rose Wood, who's chief registrar—they were very supportive of this critical race approach to American art. I remember Graham really encouraged me and we would have these debates and he would say, "How do you know that?" I'd say, "Graham you studied art history, you studied a very different body of work, reading the work of totally different scholars; I had to find my way to Jules Prown, but it was a staple for you." It was the opposite for me—Stuart Hall, [Gayatri] Spivak, Du Bois—these people were staples for me, and I could bring it to the work. Graham said to me: "American art needs this so badly." So we curated this show together called *Black Like Who* [subtitled *Exploring Race & Representation*, in 2015]. Also the registrars and preparators at Birmingham were very helpful, saying to me, "This is how this institution functions"—I got a crash course into all of the ways museums worked. One of my first all-staff meetings was with the preparators standing up and protesting an inhumane workload; they were so direct: "It is inhumane, and we will not do it anymore." It was wonderful to have these colleagues—and these were all white colleagues too!—saying, "This is what you're going to be dealing with as a Black woman, a quote unquote *diversity hire*." I was dealing with the typical drama Black curators face in art museums and they were helping me navigate it.

I got to PAFA [Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, in Philadelphia, in 2016], however, and I saw that this mistreatment of Black curators is not unique: this is the field. The support was not as widespread as I had previously thought. My approach was not appreciated at all at PAFA and then at IMA. Everybody's white. They know a little bit about the Harlem Renaissance. They know a little bit about Black abstractionists. But they really don't know Black culture. And so here I am as this little curatorial fellow who knows Black culture inside and out and I'm actually operating from Black cultural frameworks, not art historical frameworks. So, I'm pissing everybody off, right? I'm getting on everybody's nerves.

I'm in Birmingham and everybody's appreciating this. I'm in Philadelphia, which we think is a more progressive place, and they didn't understand anything.

AGJ: *Can you elaborate on your position in art institutions as you see this now?*

KM: I love to say that I entered conventional art history and art museums through the back door when no one was looking, and this somewhat quiet entry into the field allowed me to observe both the discipline and its institutions from the back of the room. Another descriptive analogy that I like to use when discussing my entry into the field is that I've been able to observe the field from within its walls or from underneath

its floors, thinking about Ralph Ellison's protagonist in *Invisible Man*.⁶ Meaning, while no one was paying much attention to me (in the ways that art institutions typically ignore or underestimate BIPOC interns and fellows), I was paying attention to everybody's performativity and the internal mechanisms of every department.

Thankfully, there were colleagues at each institution that taught me how valuable my positionality was, but most importantly they taught me how to hone it, especially my colleagues at the BMA. Basically, my training in African American studies afforded me the critical lens through which to see the many pitfalls, discrepancies, discrimination, hypocrisies, and biases that exist within art history and the museum field. So, I would situate or describe my work not as a counternarrative but more so as a corrective narrative. Meaning, I work extra hard to demonstrate that the centrality of Euro-American patriarchy in American art and art institutions isn't an unfortunate coincidence that resulted from a sordid colonial history; rather, it's very purposely designed that way to uphold Euro-American colonialism and all its vestiges.

About my experience at PAFA—I'm not going to lie, Amelia, I was devastated. PAFA was my dream institution. It had this history of five major Black artists from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s who graduated—three major Black female artists, Meta Warrick Fuller, May Howard Jackson, and Laura Wheeler Waring, were all PAFA students. I was in heaven! Until I received a reactionary response to the work I was doing. There was a moment when work was taken from me, and I wasn't given credit for it. It was one of the reasons why I resigned and said so much when I left Indianapolis, because I didn't say enough when I left PAFA. I didn't know—I was trying to do the polite thing. I only said something to board members. Once it started happening at IMA I said I've got to go to the press because I didn't go in the case of PAFA.

AGJ: *These reactions you experienced to your attempts to raise consciousness at PAFA and IMA must have been extra galling when all these institutions started publishing Black Lives Matter statements in the wake of George Floyd's murder in spring 2020. Could you say more about your emphasis on the importance of speaking out? You mention this in your lectures online.*

KM: Ridiculous. When I was at IMA it was 2018–2019, and I was like, “Let me do some reconnaissance.” I started calling around to people in the field at all levels—preparators, even directors—“How have you experienced discrimination?” And the stories! The people I'd be sent to would say, “You should talk to this person.” Some people would say they couldn't talk to me because they had signed an NDA [non-disclosure agreement]. This is what is happening with sexual harassment, gender discrimination, racial discrimination! I thought, I have an interesting skill set that can address those things. Let me see if I can bring light to this situation by using my own experiences, especially just coming off of the *mélée* of Chaédria LaBouvier's experience at the Guggenheim.⁷ I was so shocked and disappointed because the field responded so negatively to her. Are we really going to act like this isn't happening *all the time*?

AGJ: *It's going to take decades of work to peel away what I call the “well-meaning white people” problem. The art world is full of people who are convinced they mean well. It's not like, say, in finance—the art world provides a whole apparatus for maintaining a fantasy of well-meaningness.*

KM: Yeah, I call it the built-in hamster wheel, the built-in conundrum. There's an impasse—a conflict between private sector interest and the museum's public mission of care, and the two have never aligned. What we're facing in the field, this crisis moment we're having, is that chasm is getting wider every day.

AGJ: *You've been in fairly mainstream institutions. While I've written about some alternative art networks and collectives with admiration, I think it's exciting that you're in the*

official art world more or less and you're insisting on doing these things and having these conversations.

KM: Yes, and I've been criticized [for working in them]. But these institutions aren't going anywhere any time soon! These important folks, Black, white, BIPOC, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQ—who have to work in these institutions. Some people don't have the luxury or the financial means to work outside them. So, there has to be some kind of measure or recourse or voice or something—an instruction manual! Someone with a blowhorn or a drill or a sledgehammer that's there to help the folks who can't leave. At IMA Newfields, there were ten to fifteen of us going to bat against that leadership. There were certain people who were key to our strategy and what we were doing—but they couldn't leave. They had spouses, or kids they couldn't uproot. We could make all this noise, but you do have to be concerned for the people who can't leave. You can't just leave people floating.

I never wanted to start my own organization—it's just not what I wanted to do. I never wanted to start a business. We live in this hyper-neoliberal capitalist moment. Because of YouTube, Instagram—people think that if you're not monetizing your social media, you're the stupidest person on the planet.

AGJ: *Yes, there is a fetishizing of entrepreneurship that can be toxic.*

KM: Yes, yes. Mia Locks and I were talking about this, and my decision was: I'm going to stay firmly enough planted in the field to provide assistance if I can. I'm on the Museums Moving Forward [MMF] advisory board with Mia.⁸ She and her MMF colleagues are doing great work in collecting the data of the realities of discrimination for curators in particular.

AGJ: *I love the way you have spoken about historical and often personal objects more broadly as inspiring your motivation to curate. Could you talk more about how your specific take is related to your particular experience growing up in a Black family? (I'm thinking about your beautiful video about dinner parties and accessing American decorative art through your grandparents' house) (see Morgan 2021).*

KM: My entire approach to curating originates from my personal experiences with American art and material culture within my childhood home. For instance, as long as I can remember my mother had Thomas Hart Benton's *Instruction* [1940] hanging over the couch in our living room (Figure 26.2). For most of my childhood and adolescence I just assumed Benton's lithograph was an image of my grandfather. By the time I turned fourteen, I realized that it was not. But it wasn't until my time as Associate Curator of American Art at the IMA that I realized it was a Benton.

I had a similar experience at BMA with British willowware and Wedgwood ceramics. The moment I walked into BMA's Wedgwood galleries; I felt like I was surrounded by my mother's mantle (my mom has a huge collection of willowware that stayed atop of our mantle). So, the museum was a place where I saw my family and our working-class home represented within the work. And I knew if this was true for me, it was probably true for most Americans, not only for wealthy, white elites.

Because of this experience, my curatorial approach has primarily focused on permanent collections. The blockbuster exhibition model always seemed so tenuous to me—why bring a temporary show for a short influx of capital, when you could reinterpret the objects you already have, and create a steady stream of income through memberships and community partnerships? Yes, representation is important, but people aren't as myopic as museums are. Meaning, people can see themselves in more objects than those that reflect their racial or gender identity. What's more is to think about the possibilities for genuine engagement if art museums really cared, wholistically, about visitors seeing themselves in the actual *space*. And that's what I've always done with my shows and gallery reinstalls. I



FIGURE 26.2 Kelli Morgan and her mother Marlene Smith in their living room circa 1992. Thomas Hart Benton's lithograph, *Instruction*, 1940, is on the wall in the far left-hand corner. Courtesy of Marlene Smith.

try my best to hang and interpret works so that people feel a sense of home and familiarity with the objects *and* within the gallery itself.

AGJ: *What are your thoughts about how and why the visual art-related institutions have been the most resistant to addressing structural racism (versus, say, the music industry or literature)? Or perhaps you disagree with this assessment?*

KM: Art museums have been reluctant and resistant to addressing structural racism because both visually and culturally they are the quintessential institutions that maintain it. Stated more specifically, art museums represent the cultural wing of systemic racism. From their architecture, which mimics that of US courthouses and most southern plantations, to their internal hierarchies and what objects are on view, art museums literally dictate how and what we see as valuable. Unfortunately, but not coincidentally, that message has always been expressed by white, wealthy men. Additionally, because all major art museums are controlled by boards comprised mostly of wealthy, white men, and their progeny (particularly the New York institutions), and the museum director archetype is also a privileged white male, art museums were literally designed as the celebratory realm for white wealthy men.

Going back to early European Wunderkammers, which were [early modern] private collections amassed by European elites who were typically involved in the colonization of Africa and the Americas (families like the Medicis in Italy or individuals like Sir John Soane in England), the art museum was the white man's scared space to see himself and all that he could do and be in the world reflected, meaning it was the place where he celebrated his sense of power the most. The entire museum complex grew out of colonization and European imperialist desire: natural history museums, botanical gardens, zoos, national parks, and ethnographic museums represented everything white men believed that they could do to and with the world as these were the spaces where they displayed everything and everybody in it, and art museums became the spaces where they exclusively represented themselves.

And for all intents and purposes, the art museum worked for centuries to culturally elevate white men to very high socioeconomic positions. It also worked to bolster a

sense of power, pride, and belonging among white middle-class audiences literally the world over and that's not something white people or white institutions are going to dismantle just because it harms other groups. They know very well that it does because that harm is the very functionality of all the institutions (education, healthcare, criminal justice, museums, etc.) which maintain their high cultural, political, and socioeconomic statuses in the first place.

AGJ: *You bring up this deep fabric of racism and other social hierarchies. It's not just that museums are passively continuing that. They are the main sites where it is scripted and sustained—they are essential to the continuation of white neoliberal late capitalism.*

KM: Yes, the money is tied to the system of late capitalism. What's been fascinating to me as I prepare teaching my "Art, Whiteness, and Empire" course, Amelia, is that the museum today is based on the exact same model the Medici family used in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy! Capitalism and structural racism function in tandem, and that literally is why the field doesn't change; I don't think it is ever going to acknowledge these structures wholistically. While people on all sides get it, the funding model is the problem. Nizan Shaked (2022) outlines this beautifully in her book! With organizations such as MMF, we're trying to galvanize the middle, to force the foundations (Ford, Mellon, National Endowment for the Arts) to follow us, as a way to force the trustees out. We haven't totally figured out a solution to that part of the problem.

AGJ: *It's such a hidden problem. It's the same at universities, at USC—the trustees are a group of almost all white businesspeople who direct the university behind closed doors. None of them understand academia.*

KM: Right, and their interests are diametrically opposed to what we're doing. In the case of the arts, they direct the cultural wing—art museums and ballet—two of the whitest institutions. They perpetuate Euro-American capitalist white supremacy, and we never really talk about it in those terms. We never think about culture as a foundational pillar to systemic racism. The vestiges of colonization and Western imperialism and the way racism and capitalism function in tandem is the problem.

AGJ: *What do you think about the way the art world rushed to be "woke" and "politically correct" (words the right has distorted), to do the right thing in the George Floyd moment, and the other side—the way these little scandals erupt in the art world—such as that around Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till in the 2017 Whitney Biennial.⁹ How much do those scandals just siphon out smaller moments of conflict and allow us to avoid addressing these bigger, structural issues (which critical race theory specifically notes as the underlying conditions of any individual form of racism)?*

KM: The Dana Schutz example illustrates that point so well. Anybody who tried to parse it out—to say, it's not about Dana as an individual, this is a much bigger issue—was shut down. Even by some prominent Black artists. The other thing that is shocking—well not really, as you know the saying, "All skinfolk ain't kinfolk"—the way artists of color can benefit from how the system is currently structured. There are certain "chosen ones," who have made it to the top; they don't necessarily want to ruffle the feathers up there by saying the wrong thing. They too want to join the white neoliberal capitalist bandwagon. You can't critique it once you hit a particular tax bracket.

I spoke about the Dana Schutz controversy publicly. It's not just that she did it, it's what she said about it, that she didn't know. There's no way you don't know. We've all been socialized in the spectacle of Black death. So you *knew* what the response was going to be.

AGJ: *Interesting—but I think most white people really don't know, because they don't inhabit it, they likely don't know any Black people.*

KM: You think so? I think more white people know than are willing to admit it. That was the standpoint I took: there's no way she didn't know. What made you think it was a good idea to recreate the desecration of the body in the casket, when that was his mom's [Mamie Till-Mobley's] decision. There's no way she didn't know. The idea she presented: "I sympathize as a mother," but to your point, you can't sympathize as a mother because you don't fear for your kids' lives every time they walk out the door [like a Black mother does].¹⁰

AGJ: *That's I guess what I'm trying to say. The "well-meaning whiteness" I spoke of before is more dangerous in some ways than overt white supremacy. I can feel it in myself—if you're white and were raised in a liberal middle-class family, it's the idea that if you just "do the right things," even if you have no understanding of these forms of violence, you're somehow a good person and deserve a pass. This problem is so pervasive and yet so repressed in our culture. It's better that we're having these discussions about who is allowed to say what again—but let's remember, we already had them in the 1960s and 1970s.*

KM: Right? That's the part that drives me crazy, as a historian. We're always going around with this shit.

AGJ: *Exactly. Because there's an erasure of historical memory. Every time I hear a white person say, "everything's so destabilized," for example, since Trump was elected in the United States and we had the pandemic, I think, "destabilizing for whom?" Those narratives by white liberal people are not just myopic, they're racist. They erase everything that was going on for other people at other times, the specific histories.*

KM: Right. Right. I often use Hitler and the Holocaust and WWII to trouble that effect. To say that: nobody's praising Hitler, but his whole point was, "If you're going to shut Germany out of the colonizing game, we're going to colonize the Western World." And he almost did it—he only failed because he got greedy and grossly underestimated Russian snipers! WWII is hardly ever discussed as a major fight between European countries and the United States over who would hold the biggest portions of the colonized world. The US involvement, particularly the Ford [Motor Company] legacy, was a part of my worldview and a well-known thing even before I started studying history. We were a Ford family. My dad worked for Ford; I had cousins who worked for Ford. It was not a secret in Detroit when Ford sent engineers to Germany to outfit Auschwitz [for the Holocaust]. It was because Ford was so tied to Tuskegee Institute and George Washington Carver that a lot of Black families in Detroit hail from Alabama—many Tuskegee grads came to Detroit to work for Ford.¹¹ It was the only company that would hire Black engineers. There's that history too.

I always tell people: WWII is one of my favorite moments in history—WWII and Vietnam—because they clearly demonstrate that intersectionality that Kimberlé Crenshaw talks about all the time. The way that patriarchy and capitalism and white supremacy function in tandem. And just how nefarious it is for white folks to cop to wholistically, depending on where they are class-wise, and depending on what their comfortability is in their liberalism.

AGJ: *Why do you think it is so hard for people with privilege, white liberals in this case—whose privilege is invisible because it's never been structurally challenged—to acknowledge this system of oppression that we benefit from?*

KM: People don't want to. We don't like to challenge ourselves to walk a mile every day! [laughs] Honestly, Americans are such privileged assholes! COVID was a great example; we were told to wear a mask, we just complained and whined because we didn't want to wear a mask. "Freedom" run amok. We're so comfortable in our ignorance. Now that comfortability in our ignorance has been warped into "freedom" and "liberty." There is this whole idea now: "I should have the freedom to be ignorant."

AGJ: *This endless rhetoric of freedom in this country is an extension and distortion of classic liberalism. But there's no consideration at all of how your "freedom" affects other people. It's completely atomizing, and that's how the system wants it. It thrives on us being atomized, divided from each other.*

KM: Uh huh. It's unbelievable. And most people don't even know. They respond in an experiential way. Not everybody has a PhD in cultural studies—but sometimes I do think everybody needs a PhD in cultural studies!

AGJ: *I witnessed the shutting down of the famous Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the early 2000s when I was teaching at University of Manchester in the United Kingdom; the country is a good ten to fifteen years ahead of the United States in shutting down initiatives that threaten the working of the neoliberal system in order to shore up this atomizing status quo.¹² I saw it happen—it was heartbreaking. And now the right wing in the United States is directly trying to stop critical thinking and accurate history being taught in primary and secondary schools, even explicitly using (or mis-using) the term critical race theory—because it "hurts white people's feelings"—what are we, 1950?!? (See Levin 2022).*

KM: Uh huh. I was thinking this is a result of the purposeful undereducation and miseducation that started to take place late 1980s early 1990s in the United States: the devaluing of education. Even the whole anti-vaccination stuff is a part of that, too. People were deliberately miseducated or undereducated and now they're like forty years old. And this is what we have to deal with.

The art world loves to do that, erase the history.

AGJ: *I always hated the spurious claims of being historical that are so common in art history, where what's often really happening is just a description of how forms or styles shift over time. That's not historical thinking! There is no contextualization.*

KM: I always thought that was odd too.

AGJ: *That kind of superficial concept of the historical serves precisely these structures you write so incisively about, for example, these different periods of WWII and Vietnam. If you know that history, you see it all differently.*

KM: Yes! Particularly, Amelia, now that we're in this moment of restitution and repatriation—these debates are everywhere. The Benin Bronzes in European collections, for example—they can't be connected to a place and a people, because if they were, you can't claim ownership.¹³ That was eye-opening to me. Indigenous, African, Native American works have to be detached from their origins—in order for them to have value in a Western market, they literally have to be severed from the people and places that created and used them.

AGJ: *Let's go deeper into the critique that critical race theory strategies afford of the fields of art history and museum curating. Per your recognition in your work of the 2017 "Museums Are Not Neutral" T-shirt campaign of Latanya Autry and Mike Murawski (Figure 26.3) and Tony Bennett's arguments about the historical context of the invention of the art museum, isn't art itself (as currently conceived) structurally Eurocentric and white dominant? (See Morgan 2020). How do you think the structurally racist exclusions and assumptions—the white supremacy—you have rightly identified in American museums relate to the European context?*

KM: Oh yes, art (as it's understood in a museum context) is absolutely Eurocentric and white dominant, and white supremacy in American art museums is a direct extension of European colonization and imperialism. We don't often think of America as a colonial power because we focus on slavery happening in the States, but that's the linchpin—slavery happened in the States! It was an industry of forced labor made possible by the near eradication of thousands of Native American nations. The United States itself was a huge colony! But that history of US colonization is hardly ever coupled with attention to how the United



FIGURE 26.3 Latanya Autry and Mike Murawski's "Museums Are Not Neutral" T-shirt campaign, 2017. MUSEUMS ARE NOT NEUTRAL.

States colonized Hawaii, Alaska, California, and Texas or to its current colonization of Guam, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Samoa, and other territories. America mimicked European colonialist and imperialist activity to a point, perfected it, then called it democracy. When all the while it wasn't democracy or liberty or freedom—it was whiteness, or white cultural hegemony. Honestly, I believe that's the most terrifying thing about the United States—the ideas of freedom, citizenship, humanity, etc., as white and male.

So yes, art history is extremely problematic because it was an academic discipline (along with anthropology) literally designed to justify European colonization and imperialist activity. Universities are important here and problematic as well. For example, art history's racist foundations were constructed by European scholars ([Johann Friedrich] Blumenbach, [Petrus] Camper, [Johann] Winkelmann, etc.) lecturing at academic institutions that doubled as medical schools and art schools. Therefore, I try to encourage my students, my mentees, and the museum professionals that I train to look at the "how." How did these things that we take for face value come into being? How were they designed? What answers can we find underneath the facades? And let me tell you, there are *a lot* of answers.

AGJ: *It would be great to hear you discuss specific exhibitions and/or institutional initiatives that take on and directly fight against this structural racism. A lot of the work you do is both intellectual but also organizational: you work with outside community as well as labor to build community within the institution. Per your own argument in one lecture: How does collaboration become a major strategy to fight the systemic racism in the art world? (See Morgan 2021). Within this, your thoughts on BIPOC labor—exploitation and lack of appreciation—and art institutions would be valuable.*

KM: I am inspired by many examples of people fighting against structural racism in the art world.¹⁴ After I resigned from the IMA at Newfields, I began thinking with Judith Pinero, Executive Director of the Association of Art Museum Curators, about how to

retrain museum professionals to navigate and usurp the white supremacist, patriarchal realities of art museums and how to equip emerging professionals with the proper tools to recognize it and challenge it when they see it. Most museum professionals are trained in art history or museum studies, which do not teach students how deeply embedded both racism and sexism are in both disciplines, as well as within museums. Nor do those disciplines teach students the very real functionalities and mechanisms of racism and sexism within the field. Additionally, art history and museum studies don't often teach students how to navigate the job market, what questions to ask during interviews, how to recognize when they are being gaslit or discriminated against within an institution, etc. So, I designed a curatorial studies curriculum [at Tufts University] that covers that material and trains students in the skills that they need to thrive in traditional institutions or to build their own.

For example, my Curating as Community Organizing course walks students through how to build coalitions and community both within and outside the institution. It emphasizes the necessity of not siloing oneself to curatorial [practice] and teaches students how to work in community with all kinds of people even if the museum does not support that professional approach. My Curatorial Approaches course uses Black feminist scholarship and the history of Black curatorial strategies to teach students how to develop a practice of care. Lastly, my Art, Whiteness, and Empire course demonstrates how the entire museum complex developed from Euro-American colonization and imperialism and how that truth produces the various issues with diversity, equity, and inclusion museums are struggling with today.

AGJ: *Who are the thinkers in Anti-Racist and/or CRT you find the most useful in your work, and potentially most useful for forward thinking? How does your work build on the work of critical race theorists but also on maverick Black curators? How does it forge new and different paths?*

KM: There are so many! But to name quite a few, I often use: Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Angela Davis, Stuart Hall, Christina Sharpe, Saidiya Hartman, Nicole Fleetwood, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Combahee River Collective, Barbara Christian, LaTanya Autry, Mike Murawski, Porchia Moore, Walter Rodney, and Kris Manjapra.

In thinking about the work of James Porter, Elizabeth Catlett, Dr. Samella Lewis, and Dr. David Driskell, none of us Black folks doing museum work in white institutions would be here without the major interventions they made in the field. Porter established that African American art history was a substantial discipline with its own canon, rules, aesthetics, and artists. Dr. Lewis was pioneering in institution building: establishing both the Museum of African American Art in California and the *International Review of African American Art* at Hampton University. Dr. Driskell broke through conventional museum walls to get the work of Black artists on view with his *Two Centuries of Black American Art* exhibition [at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1976], and Mrs. Catlett was a phenomenal artist, teacher, and activist who trained tens of Black revolutionaries.¹⁵

I think my work builds on theirs as, again, I wouldn't be here without all the amazing work and risks they took. But I think my work is different in that I'm not looking to be in the room, I'm there to completely redesign and restructure it. For me representation is necessary but not nearly enough and we should all be honest enough to admit at this point that it hasn't worked to change the underlying issues and structures of traditional institutions. And I'm here, I'm curating, mentoring, training, and teaching to do *that*. Much like Serena Williams, I'm taking the opposition head on so that my students and my mentees won't have to.

The historical traditions of HBCUs [Historic Black Colleges and Universities] like Fisk with Aaron Douglass, Clark Atlanta University and Talladega College with Hale

Woodruff, Lincoln University and Cheney University of Pennsylvania with Laura Wheeler Waring, Howard University's art and art history department, and Hampton University and Spelman College's museums all provide the foundations for Black art historical and curatorial practices. We have always done the work in our own institutions, schools, churches, and homes. And we still do. So honestly no, none of these white institutions can be completely dismantled even though, yes, they are inherently structurally white supremacist. But these institutions are not going anywhere any time soon, so where I think Black feminism offers us a chance to build better, separate institutions, I also think it provides vital maps for how to navigate around, under, and through white supremacy culture in traditional institutions.

Notes

- 1 This dialogue took place via email August 13–14, 2022, and over a zoom conversation on August 15, 2022; it has been edited for flow. Unless otherwise noted, endnotes are by Amelia Jones.
- 2 On Crenshaw and 2021–2022 debates about CRT in the United States, see Omokha 2021. On the origins of CRT, see Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995).
- 3 Dr. Porchia Moore describes herself as a “museum critical race theorist,” and is head of the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Florida; and hooks (1994) is a classic Black feminist contribution to radical pedagogy.
- 4 Morgan started her career as Curatorial Fellow of African American Art at Birmingham Museum of Art (2014–15), then moved to Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts as Winston and Carolyn Lowe Curatorial Fellow (2016–2017). Her position at Indianapolis was Associate Curator of American Art and she was there for two and a half years (2018–2020). In 2021, she became Professor of Practice and Director of Curatorial Studies at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts.
- 5 Charles Venable was the president of the museum, and in early 2021 ratified a job listing for a director who could maintain the museum's “traditional, core, white art audience”; the job posting was disseminated over social media, a petition was circulated to call for his resignation, and Venable was pressured to resign a month later. Morgan's resignation was an early wake-up call for the museum. See Greenberger (2021).
- 6 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952) is a classic of Black literature that addresses the issues faced by African Americans in the early and mid-twentieth century.
- 7 See Burton (2020).
- 8 Mia Locks is now an independent curator and co-founded Museums Moving Forward, a “data driven initiative to support greater equity and accountability in art museum workplaces through coalition-building, research, and advocacy,” from the website *Museums Moving Forward*, available at: <https://museumsmovingforward.com>, accessed August 26, 2022. Similarly to Morgan's resignation from IMA, Locks resigned from the position of Senior Curator at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2021, because the institution lacked support for diversity initiatives; see Durón (2021).
- 9 On this particular scandal, and the protest by artist Parker Bright, see “Whitney Biennial: Emmett Till casket painting by white artist sparks anger,” *The Guardian* (March 21, 2017), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/mar/21/whitney-biennial-emmett-till-painting-dana-schutz>. Worth noting in this context is that Mia Locks co-curated this version of the Whitney Biennial with Christopher Y Lew.
- 10 On Shultz comments, see Smith (2017).
- 11 Carver, the head of Alabama-based Tuskegee Institute and an agricultural chemist, was invited to Dearborn, Michigan, in 1942 by Henry Ford to experiment with crops and rubber production; see Harris (n.d.).

- 12 The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, at the Centre, was the epicenter for the development of British cultural studies, which, in turn, played a huge role in anglophone criticism and scholarship in expanding history and theory beyond Eurocentric and white dominant assumptions.
- 13 On the Benin Bronzes being looted from what is now Nigeria by European countries in the late nineteenth century, see McGonnell (2021).
- 14 Morgan: "People that I believe are doing work that takes on and directly fights against structural racism are LaTanya Autry and Mike Murawski. Their MUSEUMS ARE NOT NEUTRAL campaign blew the door off the hinges for museum professionals like me that are committed to social justice and anti-racism. LaTanya's Black Liberation Center and Mike's Institute for Change Makers are direct initiatives that train arts professionals in best practices that usurp structural racism and center caring for people as a professional praxis. In fact, I'm learning from them both as well as the folks at MASS Action, the Inluseum, Museums & Race, and the entire Museum Equity Coalition in designing the curriculum for my new graduate certificate program in Anti-Racist Curatorial Practice at Tufts University. Others that I truly admire are Amin Husain, Natasha Dhillon and everyone that comprises Decolonize This Place, as well as scholars like Porchia Moore, Nicole Ivy, and Kajette Solomon."
- 15 Catlett taught at Hillside Highschool in Durham, North Carolina, where this editor attended school years later (1975–1977), but, tellingly, I was never told about her work; she also taught at Dillard University in New Orleans, George Washington Carver School in Harlem, and Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas at National Autonomous University of Mexico from 1958 to her retirement in 1975.

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POSTSTRUCTURALISM/ POSTMODERNISM/ POSTCOLONIALISM

Mapping Poststructuralism, Postmodernism, and Postcolonialism

April Baca

The intellectual and cultural emergence of discourses around the term “post” in the late twentieth-century Euro-American and anglophone contexts (which I will call “post- discourses”) can be best understood as signaling a denial, or at the very least complication, of preceding methods of inquiry. In the context of the arts, for example, use of this prefix in the term postmodernism has been attributed to largely US-generated artistic and scholarly works of the 1960s–1990s. This period earmarked a cultural shift for artists, theorists, activists, and creative communities that would come to question modernist ideals prominent from the late seventeenth century Enlightenment through the early to mid-twentieth century. The origins of the political energies behind key movements such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism that played a significant role throughout the late twentieth century, however, span back as far as the late nineteenth century, and must be contextualized in relation to the ideas these new movements were said to move beyond (“post”).

To foreground these considerations, it is important to introduce the scope of what postmodernism has historically been contrasted against—that is, modernism. Modernism as a philosophical and arts movement grew out of the sweeping social, cultural, and political transformations that arose from global industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The movement marked a period of experimentation wherein many creatives sought to revitalize or break from traditional techniques and narratives. At the same time, industrialization continued to reorganize the world as societies were transformed by mechanization and mass production, and in the service of international trade, wrought environmental devastation and global warfare (on these points, see Lawrence 1997; Rodney 2018).¹

Early cultural contributors and activists whose scholarship would figure prominently across later post- discourses span myriad chronological and geographical locales, all energized by the political urgency of resisting European colonialism and certain forces of modernity. For example, the Négritude movement led by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, French Guianese poet Léon Damas, and future Senegalese president and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor in the 1930s and 1940s illustrates an early model of anticolonial resistance that would provide the foundation for more contemporary decolonial scholarship. Meanwhile across the globe, early twentieth-century Puerto Rican artists, scholars, and

activists, including the feminist poet and abolitionist Julia de Burgos Garcia, laid the foundation for pertinent critiques of Western modernization and its role in reshaping and displacing communities throughout the Global South. In India this sociopolitical shift would be visualized through a group of artists known as the Bengal School, led by Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), who asserted that the Indian appropriation of modern art could render a genre that was uniquely Indian. The rise of modernity and modernism in regions such as South Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meanwhile prompted national movements in India and Africa toward self-reliance wherein activists, artists, and intellectuals sought independence from European colonial rule (see Mitter 1994).

Despite the globally dispersed origins of post- discourses, they continue to be predominately attributed to the West, with particular emphasis on white, middle-class, able-bodied, and hetero-masculine contributors—theoretical, artistic, and otherwise. The attribution of these theories as foundationally Euro-American, which is factually inaccurate, is more deeply insidious in the violence it perpetrates through the erasure of minoritarian, female-identified, and globally dispersed originators and contributors. This violence upholds the naturalization of patriarchal, white supremacist, and hetero-capitalist legacies by arguing mainstream Euro-American culture to be the singular origin point of post- discourses. The obfuscation of these other anticolonial histories and cultural contributions has resulted in the misconception that modernism and its offshoots are primarily American and European phenomena. This has made it increasingly difficult for many to conceive of modernism as a global occurrence (Hegel 1952/1977).

It is in this vein that this chapter seeks to detail and expand upon the chronologies of post- movements including postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism as shaped within and beyond a North American and Western European context. The scope of this chapter will juxtapose each movement alongside its predecessor, including modernism and postmodernism, structuralism and poststructuralism, colonialism and postcolonialism, and will culminate with a brief overview of late postmodernism and post-postmodernity. I will contextualize each of these discourses through their respective historical frameworks while outlining the ways in which theoretical and artistic modes of inquiry have sought to reify, deviate from, or contest them.

Chronologizing Modernism and Modernity

The emergence of modernist literary theory, criticism, and cultural production is most notably correlated with experimental and avant-garde forms rendered in the Euro-American context between WWI (1914–1918) and WWII (1939–1949) with some divergent practices from the 1890s to present. As a historically descriptive term modernism has remained somewhat misleading in that the movement both exists within and defies its own definitions. The championing of industry, a defining characteristic of modernism, for example, would have one believe that advocating in favor of industrialization is synonymous with the genre. Early modernist engagements, however, were largely antagonistic to industrialization and instead emphasized utopian worlds devoid of the perils that modern industry had wrought. For example, the British textile artist and social activist William Morris was a major contributor to the British Arts and Crafts Movements (1880–1920), which sought to revive traditional British textile arts. The movement advocated for socioeconomic reform and was anti-industrial in its orientation—a reaction against the perceived impoverishment of the decorative arts and rote methods of production. These ideas related to the twentieth-century modernist preoccupation with originality and would eventually garner vehement supporters including art critics such as Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg. Both critics located New York as the epicenter of modernist production with Greenberg specifically suggesting that “realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium ... [while]

modernism used art to call attention to art.” (This trajectory is also explored extensively in Jones 2012). This position would come to represent the paradox of modernism as a genre that has both upheld and antagonized individualism and traditional Euro-American socio-cultural and political values.

The cultural and political emphasis on the individual at the turn of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would be explicitly rendered through artistic and literary movements such as Futurism, abstraction, and the historic avant-gardes (Greenberg 1995, 86). Artists such as the Swedish painter and mystic Hilma af Klimt, whose abstract compositions in the early twentieth century are often considered among the first in Western art history, reconceived the role of the artist as a conduit for social and spiritual innovation (Bürger 1974/1984). The Cuban American abstractionist Carmen Herrera would similarly illustrate an early preoccupation with movement and spatiality through hard-edged compositions. This conceptual interest in foregrounding the relationship between art, spirituality, and personal identity would parallel the emergence of phenomenology in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Muller-Westernmann and Hogsberg 2020, 280). As a theoretical movement, phenomenology seeks broadly to examine the relationship between embodied experience and knowledge by foregrounding corporeality.² This emphasis on embodiment and subjective interchange would reappear throughout postmodern performance and body art of the 1970s–1980s by focusing on the primacy of the body in the art experience.³

Also related to this foregrounding of embodiment and fascination with perceptual experience was the rapid expanse of globalization throughout the early to mid-twentieth century—with increasingly rapid and common international trade, travel, and the dissemination of information. These trends would similarly yield a heightened dispersal of Western avant-garde trends and practices but also, reciprocally, a bringing of other cultural modes into Euro-American contexts. In this way, we see the concurrent emergence of modernism and concepts of avant-gardism in Japan and East Asia from the 1920s onward, including pivotal movements such as Gutai (c. 1954), the Indian cultural renaissance in Bengal (The Bengali Renaissance: 1757–1970s), Brazilian Modernism (1922—), and later, sub-Saharan and central African modernisms across Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, and Zambia, to name a few (see Herz 2015, 10; Wu 2014, 189).

The emergence of psychoanalysis at the turn of the twentieth century as a method for treating psychiatric conditions as well as understanding the relationship between humans and their environment gained footing during this rapidly changing sociocultural landscape. Established in the 1890s by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, psychoanalytic theory would become immensely important to modernist genres such as Surrealism and, later, to the poststructuralist psychoanalytic theory of Parisian psychiatrist Jacques Lacan and others. Surrealism’s leading preoccupation with rendering the unconscious mind visible was largely driven by Freud’s theory.⁴ However, despite the discipline’s emphasis on immaterial drives and impulses, many of its driving theories remained largely reliant on tenuously figured stereotypes. Freud’s 1933 lecture on “Femininity,” for instance, defines women as a problem through what he asserted as “the riddle of femininity” or of sexual differentiation (Freud 1933/1968, 116). This would be further compounded by his racist and sexist characterization of women’s sexuality as a “dark continent,” a term borrowed from colonial surveyor Henry Morton Stanley’s (1878) description of Africa in his text *Through the Dark Continent: Volume I*. Lacan would later, mid-twentieth century, expand on many of these concepts developed by Freud to reassess the role of the unconscious in constructions of otherness and personal identity. This would provide the theoretical foundation for Lacan’s more well-known contributions including his theorization of the Mirror Stage (1936/1949). The mirror within Lacan’s concept acts as a metaphor for the ways in which a subject self-identifies or misrecognizes their own subjecthood as separate from the mother (Lacan 1936/2006, 94–99).⁵ Akin to Freud’s libidinal economies of need and desire Lacan’s

conception of femininity and female sexuality is figured as hysteric or submissive to heteromale fantasies (see Soler 2006). This position would eventually be taken up in postmodern psychoanalytic feminist theory, where theorists expanded on Lacan's typology of the masculine and feminine and its potential for subversion. This includes criticism from notable feminist psychoanalysts such as Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, and the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, each of whom argued against the ignoring and erasure of female experience within the discipline.

Structuralism and Poststructuralism

The conceptual preoccupation with theories of the unconscious, social existence, and their place within modernity would result in the parallel rise of early twentieth-century European philosophical movements such as structuralism (roughly 1900–1950s). Structuralism's most notable characteristic is the concern with meaning and language, which led many exploring the concept to try and identify ways in which meaning takes place and is articulated through words and images, as well as the structures that substantiate linguistic methods. Often interpreted through its relationship to Cold-War-era high modernism, structuralism is largely predicated on the notion that identities, values, and social conditions determine each other and cannot exist independently. The genre's origins are chronologically tied to the 1906–1911 lectures on semiotics of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, which were published posthumously in French and later translated into English as *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). Saussure's assertion that language is both conventional and arbitrary relies on key concepts such as the interplay between the *signifier*, a visual form, the *signified*, or meaning, and the *sign* (a combination of both). Structuralism's formal emphasis on the relationship between visuality and arbitrary structures would prompt its post-1960 use within aesthetic criticism and the visual arts. Here, the relationship between the sign (the artwork) and the viewer is understood through the immediate structures that they both exist within the physical edifice of the museum or gallery, genre, medium, language, and regional place. An example of this includes the work of US-based conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs* (1965), which demonstrates that the meaning, value, and material properties of art are predicated entirely on contextual structures that shape its interpretation. This, however, reduces artwork to a system of structures, which often imply a final fixed meaning; it also renders artists as conduits for culture rather than as creators with potential agency.

This latter point is pertinent when moving into the immediate period preceding the rise of postmodernism and poststructuralism, wherein it is crucial to differentiate Greenbergian formalism, which ignores the subjectivity of interpretation, from the formalism of structuralism, which infers that every element of an artwork is understood through preexisting systems of thinking. American art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss would later elaborate on these distinctions through an initially structuralist, and later poststructuralist, position that sought to reject the monolithic authoritarianism of structuralism. *October* magazine, which Krauss co-founded and co-edited, would feature essays that extol the value of individual interpretation over objective analysis while rejecting the authority of inherited modernist structures. The magazine would become massively influential in Western artistic and intellectual circles and earmark the rise of *Octoberist* criticism—a New York-centered rhetoric that dominated American art criticism in the 1980s and 1990s and promoted artists who were believed to demonstrate a commitment to its dicta—for example, a generalized Marxism and Eurocentric avant-gardism.⁶

The rise of poststructuralism (1960s–early 1980s) as a critical reevaluation of structuralist thought cued a rapid shift away from an attachment to empirical systems of meaning. Rather than understanding sociocultural and political structures as natural or given, poststructuralism has been invested in examining how these structures generate meaning and value in relation

to ideas, institutions, and modes of subjectivity. This critical reassessment of the idea of an original or implicit meaning adhering to art works was a radical departure from structuralism's systemization of language (even art language) as a seemingly transparent medium that is always connected to a preexisting referent or to fixed "truth." The work of French literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes—including his essay "The Death of the Author" in 1968, which was highly influential in art discourse—would mark a decisive shift away from structuralist objectivity by foregrounding the importance of personal interpretation. While structuralist formalism in art critical discourse argues that the meaning and value of a final work is unchanging upon its completion, Barthes challenged this assumption by establishing the power of the reader (or viewer) whose personal understanding, according to Barthes, is informed by uncontrollable aspects particular to individual readers; therefore meaning is constantly changing. The longstanding individualism that had saturated modernism, connecting meaning to a singular *maker* (usually white and male), as interpreted in a supposedly neutral way by a critic such as Greenberg, was finally beginning to lose its grip with the "birth of the reader" now functioning as a key model to understanding the relationship between viewers and works of art (Barthes 1967/1977).

Barthes's emphasis on the reader's relationship to the text or work (which he elaborated as a kind of *intertextuality*) is largely predicated on an earlier theorization of intertextuality by the Bulgarian-French philosopher and feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva. Much of Kristeva's interdisciplinary scholarship of the 1970s and following adopted a psychoanalytic approach to poststructuralist conceptions of female sexuality and motherhood. Kristeva's notion of *abjection*, a concept that describes the violent movement of an infant away from the threat of an all-consuming, powerful maternal body (a theoretical redress of Lacan, who ignored or pathologized femininity) would establish a vital feminist reconceptualization of the uterus as a mediated symbolic space (see Sjöholm 2009, 181). Kristeva's work on feminine corporeality, excess, and bodily fluids paralleled the work of Belgian-born French feminist psychoanalytic theorist Luce Irigaray (see Whitford 1991, 97). Irigaray's work similarly appropriates but reconfigures Lacanian conceptions of subjectivity to examine the ways in which phallic economies, or *phallogentrism*s, align women-identified persons with exchangeable signs.⁷ Both Kristevan and Irigarayan ideas about the female body and abjection have been prominently figured across postmodern feminist arts practices, contemporary popular culture, and film. This includes, but is by no means limited to, the work of artists Louise Bourgeois, Paul McCarthy, Ana Mendieta, Tatsumi Hijikata, Mary Kelly, and Kiki Smith. For example, Kiki Smith's installation *Tale* (1992) features a beeswax sculpture of a woman crawling on the ground with a trail of fabricated feces trailing behind her. The work is notable for having been signaled out during the height of the culture wars (1990s) by the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art who called it "simple disgusting." Rather than a direct provocation, *Tale* visualizes the internal detritus, or shit, that is dragged around within bodies. Though the lens of abjection, Smith's work can be understood dualistically. First, by highlighting still yet taboo bodily waste in the otherwise sanitized setting of the art gallery, Smith ironically posits abjection's prohibition. Secondly, the condition of abjection can allude to the marginalization of the subject and in turn, exposes power and the viewer's role therein. The work then becomes both a physical metaphor and mirror for the viewer's own abject positionality—one that is immediate and relatable to grossness, shame, and humiliation that comes with having a body.

By the 1970s and early 1980s the various competing models of poststructuralist thought was largely comprised of mainstay poststructuralist theories written in French in the 1960s and published in English from the late 1960s onward, including influential work by philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Both theorists were invested in re-introducing historical elements to destabilize fixed meaning. For Foucault, this involved an explicitly historiographical technique that was developed as an *archaeology* or *genealogy*, both involving strategies of excavating the systems of thought (*epistemes*) and knowledge

(*discursive formations*) that define subjects and social spaces in relation to structures of power. Foucault's examination of systemized otherness (social, cultural, political, structural, etc.) and power would be formalized across works including *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and the unfinished four volume series, *The History of Sexuality* (1976–2021**).⁸ These texts explore the social and theoretical mechanisms that undergird Western formations of identity and power and provide a model to understand how minoritarian communities continue to be impacted through these formations. Derrida meanwhile formalized his methodological approach as deconstruction. The term would first appear in his publication *Of Grammatology* (*De la grammatologie*, 1967; translated in 1976 by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) and his call therein for the radical liberation of writing from ideas of speech (as securing the “presence” of the articulating subject) (Derrida 1967/1976). This gesture is predicated on deconstructing the idea of an origin of language or meaning commonly found in European philosophy up to that point. Through this deconstruction, meaning by consequence is shown to always be in motion and in process. Deconstruction builds on this to dismantle language as a fixed sign system by playing arguments against themselves through the introduction of different languages and significations to illustrate contradictory meanings. As a theoretical mode of inquiry, Derrida's theoretical strategy of deconstruction primarily sought to reconceive the role of difference and dismantle naturalized hierarchies and seemingly opaque systems.

Postcolonialism Across and Beyond the West

Exemplified by the fact that the 1976 translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* was completed by Gayatri Spivak, a key figure in academic postcolonial theory as well as in transnational feminist theory, the rise of postcolonialism would chronologically parallel global poststructuralisms and its offshoots and would consolidate movements occurring during the emergence of its theories and practices. This included critical rights initiatives established in the aftermath of Western colonialism—for example, the movements to decolonize various African countries in the 1950s and early 1960s—which sought to reclaim the agency of those subjugated under various forms of imperialism. The postcolonial movement would signal a critical cultural turn in struggles toward self-determination and self-governance against colonial domination. Despite the historical complexity of initial colonization via European imperialism—which took place between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in the Americas, Australia, the West Indies, and Southeast Asia and, in considerably different forms, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Pacific, East Asia, and other parts of the world—the recurrent focus of postcolonial scholarship has been steadfast in examining, and resisting, the persistence of empire (see Prakash 1995; Appadurai 1996). Though discourses within the genre are globally dispersed, postcolonial theory as a more official movement arising in the 1980s academy remains deeply predicated on critiquing the violence of European expansion (since around 1400) and its lingering characteristics (Enwezor and Zaya 2013).

Before the rise of this official academic postcolonial theory, however, African cultural theorists and artists critical of the historic interrelationships among colonialization, capitalism, Atlantic slavery, and Africa shaped its nascent foundations through anticolonial activist endeavors. Aimé Césaire's founding role in the mid-twentieth-century Négritude movement would thus have a tremendous impact not only on postcolonial theory but also on the development of modern African art and subsequently contemporary African art (Enwezor and Zaya 2013). Césaire's conceptualization of African sovereignty would stand in stark contrast to global modernisms that figured Africa as an exotic reservoir for appropriation and capitalist exchange, most notably rendered across early modern curiosity cabinets (*Wunderkammern*) and later natural history museums, as well as through primitivist ideas circulating in the European art world during the early twentieth century, especially in movements such as cubism and fauvism. Across visual arts practices this has most notably included

work from the 1930s through the 1970s by artists such as Wilfredo Lam, Frank Bowling, Aubrey Williams, Ben Enwonwu, and Uzo Egonu, all of whom were formally affiliated with the Négritude movement across Africa and the Caribbean (Négrismo). African modernists such as Samuel Ntiro and Ibrahim El Salahi would, in the 1950s through the 1970s, visualize the oppressive othering of these modes of thought through vividly rendered painterly compositions that appropriated modernist motifs through an African lens. While Ntiro's verdantly rendered landscapes and flattened abstract figures emphasize rural characteristics amidst a looming agricultural industry, El Salahi's amalgamation of African, Arab, and Islamic motifs reified the distinctly hybrid identity of a newly independent Sudan.

Césaire's Afro-colonial theory would be expanded shortly thereafter by the French West Indian psychiatrist, cultural theorist, and Césaire's former student Franz Fanon, also originally from Martinique. Fanon's theorization of colonial oppression sought to illustrate the psychological transformation of colonized persons into non-subjects. For Fanon, who drew on GFW Hegel's (1952/1977) c. 1800 theory of the master/slave dialectic, these persons and communities exist in a strict dialectic wherein colonized identity is always positioned relative to the master (and, more broadly, to whiteness). Fanon's pathbreaking work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) would formalize many of these ideas by examining the hierarchal relationship between the colonizer and colonized (Fanon 1952/2008). These concepts would provide the theoretical foundation for subsequent postcolonial thought and art engaged with the binary of subject versus object under imperialism.

The dissemination of postcolonial theory across the Caribbean was thorough and it would later find its way into Europe and the United States in the 1980s as part of a rapidly changing shift in the humanities—namely, the politicization of humanities and arts disciplines prompted by the rise of parallel feminist, postcolonial, anti-racist, and, after the mid-1980s, critical race theories.⁹ The decades following WWII would specifically give rise to artistic practices and scholarship engaged with the legacies of global otherness, modernity, and migratory politics including works by theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the cultural theorist and feminist filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha. Despite the global occurrences of postcolonial theories and practices, its indebtedness to African and South Asian anticolonial movements throughout the early to late twentieth century has largely resulted in a focus on those regions within US and European academies, often times at the expense of focusing on Latin and South American cases (Coronil 2019). Within the Caribbean, usage of the term postcolonial has occupied a more tenuous position as the region's political status has encompassed the US and French possession of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Puerto Rico to Castro's Cuba. Because of this, while burgeoning postcolonial theory in the anglophone world would easily claim the Caribbean as part of its discourses during the 1980s, many early Caribbean theorists would align their work within postmodernism. The publication of *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* in 1997 would document a concerted redress of Caribbean postcoloniality that identified the term as “a reality of a transnational (but not post-national), global set of relationships and experiences” (Puri 2004, 304).

The Cuban-born Jamaican novelist and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter is noted as having explored the possibilities for a postcolonial Caribbean from 1960 through the present. Navigating US culture from a Caribbean point of view (she taught for many years at Stanford University), Wynter has established a body of work deeply engaged with the ways in which the legacies of racialization, slavery, and modernity inform what it means to be human. Wynter's theorization of human identity draws on Fanon's conception of humanness as a parallel development to “speciesism” (referring to the hierarchization of species by humans, putting humans first) to illustrate the ways in which the concept of humanity has been primarily reserved for a white Western world (Wynter 1999, 20, 2003). Wynter's most notable theory, the *overrepresentation of Man* would examine the emergence of Euro-masculine hegemony (or “Man”) and colonial modernity through a decolonial lens (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Decolonial theory is a mode of critical thinking referring to

geographically specific processes of decolonization that took place in the second part of the twentieth century throughout Asia, Africa, and South America (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Decolonization efforts that took place within these regions to regain control of the state were both successful and unsuccessful in that, while native elites replaced colonial figureheads, many of the same colonial structures remained (and to some extent continue to remain) in place.¹⁰ Decolonial theory has in turn sought to understand this relationship in order to separate and remove—or at least expose and interrogate—embedded structures of colonial thought (see Bhabha 1994, 37). The movement would be formalized through the work of both thinkers such as Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano but also Afro-Caribbean artists such as Jamaican painter Barrington Watson (1931–2016), invested in visualizing the tenuous legacies of the Black Atlantic.

Postcolonial theory would undergo further global transformations following its initiation across anticolonial movements in Asia, Africa, and South America during the mid-twentieth century. The groundbreaking conceptualization of orientalism by the Palestinian American scholar Edward Said would articulate the ways in which visual and textual representations are not supplementary to political and economic structures but function as a mechanism of power. Akin to Fanon's rethink of Hegel and Freud, Said's text *Orientalism* (1978) employs Foucault's conception of knowledge and power as a framework for understanding European representations of the Middle East (Said 1978). Said's examination of the production of knowledge situates orientalism as a structure used by the West to project onto, misinterpret, and devalue non-European persons. Said asserts that Europe's structure of "knowing the orient" through an Eastern/Western dichotomy is a necessary step in dominating it. For Said specifically, this structure of knowledge and projection includes orientalist art in the nineteenth century, much of which functioned as French imperialist propaganda. These compositions would routinely depict Asiatic countries and persons as primitive, sexualized others to be dominated and, in turn, he argues, symbolically justified colonial violence. French artists whose works were orientalizing include the canonical "masters" of that period: Eugène Delacroix, Anne Louis Girodet-Trioson, and Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. Said's text has continued to be hugely generative. Anne Cheng's text *Ornamentation* (2018) is a contemporary rethink of Said's theorization of the orient and examines the continued role of artifice and ornamentation in Western conceptions of the orient. Here, Cheng mobilizes the figure of the "yellow woman" in American history as an archetypal example of exoticized Asiatic femininity (Cheng 2018). Both Cheng's and Said's work rely on the ways in which these orientalized figures have proliferated in the Western imaginary through art and popular culture.

The explicit critique of colonialism and its impacts on representation and the Global South would continue to be developed into the late 1980s and beyond by diasporic Indian theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, both of whose careers have largely taken place in US elite universities. Spivak's work specifically expands on Said's problem of representation to account for the contemporary academy and the repression of subaltern speech. Her canonical contribution to the field, the 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," mobilizes the question of autonomous speech by examining the ways in which Western academics have misrepresented global communities; here, Spivak argues that despite attempts by scholars to forefront subaltern perspectives these interchanges are already Westernized through their representational framework (Spivak 1985/1988). This critique of Western colonialism and its impact on subjectivity would similarly provide the conceptual basis for much of Bhabha's work. Bhabha's theorization of hybridity specifically accounts for a dialectical identity (akin to Hegel's master/slave dialectic) wherein the colonized cannot exist without the colonizer and vice versa. Bhabha expands on this further to argue that all of culture and its systems are constructed through a *third space of enunciation* (see Bhabha 1994).

The conception of third space as an ambivalent and liminal forum for cultural identity would later be mobilized by Vietnamese-American feminist filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha. For Minh-ha, third space is conceived to visualize empowering hybridity using

postmodern media (Minh-ha 1989). The scope of her work is notable for establishing a feminist anti-ethnography through her decolonial and deconstructive experimental documentary films, including *Reassemblage* (1982), *Naked Spaces: Living is Round* (1985), and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989).

Establishing the Postmodern Position

The era of postmodernism and its offshoots has been largely understood through its global relationship with modernist discourse and institutions. Common use of the term postmodernism in the late 1970s and 1980s in the United States was largely driven by a demand for explanatory models to understand sweeping sociopolitical, cultural, and economic change. This is an ironic historical shift given Jean-François Lyotard's theorization of postmodernism by in the late 1970s as a critique of master narratives (Lyotard 1979/1984). Violence being perpetuated against racial and ethnic minorities, women-identifying and/or presenting persons, LGBTQIA+ groups, and other minoritarian communities was countered by expansions of the civil and human rights movements in the United States and abroad. These activist movements as well as related literary and artistic practices paralleled political and social upheavals and would serve as the model for theoretical developments such as post-structuralist philosophy—all of which would come to define contemporary postmodernisms, sometimes in contradictory ways.

Leading debates regarding the origins of the postmodern have located the movement as a radical rupture from modernism (Bhabha 1994). This break is largely evaluated through postmodernism's stark antagonism to, or subversion of, modernist ideologies. Use of the term can be located as early as 1934 when *postmodernismo* was first used by Spanish writer Federico de Onís to describe the Spanish and Latin-American poetry of 1905–1914 as a hybrid reaction against modernism. An English translation of the term would appear in 1945 by the Australian art historian Bernard Smith who used the term to describe a new “social-realist reaction” to modernist abstraction (see Rose 1991). Earlier theorists and artists whose work would be attributed as having informed discourses of postmodernism include Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Karl Marx, and avant-garde precursor movements such as Dada (from the WWI period) and the Situationists (1950s–1960s)—all European and white male dominant. Artistic movements *within* modernism such as abstract expressionism (also called the New York School), assemblage, and their offshoots would similarly signal an impending break with the stylistic and conceptual preoccupations of modernism. Women artists such as the American abstract painters Lee Krasner and Joan Mitchell, for example, created works that both affirmed and violated the supposed universalism of abstract expressionism, as claimed by dominant art critics who supported the movement, such as Clement Greenberg (see Greenberg 1991; Hobbs 2007, 3). Krasner's adoption of varying styles and interest in open-ended contexts stood in stark contradistinction to the objectivity championed by many first-generation Euro-American male abstract expressionists. Mitchell's practice meanwhile emphasized poetry and nature juxtaposed alongside the built environment and natural world. Both Krasner's and Mitchell's explosive use of color and shifting styles would signal an impending rupture within the New York School and a growing openness to the potential of postmodernism. The emergence of postmodernism as a discourse and mode of cultural production can then be conceived of not as an immediately new form of artistic production and thought but as a critical redirection of its predecessors.¹¹ Robert Rauschenberg's landmark postmodernist work *Erased de Kooning* (1953) exemplifies this idea of postmodernism as a rethinking rather than radical overturning of modernism—in this case through the younger artist's subversive appropriation and attempted (but failed) erasure of de Kooning's work.

Artistic figures associated with early postmodernisms in the United States were joined by like-minded scholars and theorists who were equally invested in upending traditionalism.

This included critics such as Leslie Fiedler, Ihab Hassan, and Susan Sontag, who argued against the violence of modernism and modernity. Sontag's work during this period (the 1960s) is most notable for her introduction of camp as radical artifice, irony, and theatricality in the wake of modernist objectivity as detailed in her influential 1964 essay "Notes on Camp."^{12, 13} Hassan's work meanwhile expanded postwar theoretical developments, including nascent structuralisms, to advocate for silence as detailed in his text *The Literature of Silence* (Hassan 1967). Following on the heels of Cold War repression in the United States, Hassan's call for silence is predicated on a "radical irony of any statement that contains its own ironic detail" (Hassan 1967, 14). This argument would ultimately come to mirror a sweeping sociopolitical experience that many in the United States, including creatives, felt amidst a largely disenchanted post-Cold War landscape. This mood of disenchantment was central to developments in the New York art world leading into postmodernism, as would be cogently rendered within Moira Roth's seminal essay "The Aesthetics of Indifference" (Roth 1977).

The term postmodernism would continue to undergo shifts until its more formalized use in the 1970s to describe then emergent practices in architecture, theater, painting, film and music, and dance. In contrast, postmodernism in the visual arts has remained largely predicated on questions surrounding representation, formal expression, and political hegemonies. Much of postmodern architecture drew on appropriation of previous styles (mostly pre-modernist) and constructed composite buildings from myriad styles that eschewed material longevity in favor of decorative form, physical context, and an irreverence towards modernist architectural dicta such as "form follows function" (Fowler 1984). Feminist approaches to the field would contextualize the social significance of the home as a site for gendered reproduction (Fowler 1984).

In the visual arts, increasingly popular genres such as muralism, conceptual art, body and performance art, land art, and installation would become the dominant mediums for many postmodernist artists. Literary and artistic appropriation as a critical reevaluation of preexisting structures would specifically lend itself to these inquiries by providing the structural foundation for critical feminist, race, and class theories to reassess aesthetic and theoretical hegemonies. While arguably connected to similar strategies of appropriation and reuse in earlier forms of (male-dominated) pop art in Britain and the United States—such as the British Independent Group and the New York and LA based pop artists like Andy Warhol and Ed Ruscha—this critical approach in the 1980s was exemplified by the strategies of US feminist artists such as Sherrie Levine, Lorna Simpson, and Elaine Sturtevant, each of whom developed practices predicated on the feminist appropriation of other artists' works. Sturtevant's work, for example, marked an end point in the history of postwar art in the United States wherein for many feminist visual artists, appropriation became a way to interrogate male authorial privilege. Sturtevant's appropriation (or what she termed repetitions) of her male peer's artworks instigated a critical redress of visibility and systems of valuation. And while Sturtevant's copies would initially prompt the early misconception that her practice was explicitly about the art of others, works such as *Pontificate* (1962) complicate this read through Sturtevant's broad and purposefully nondescript nod to male contemporary expressionists. *Pontificate's* muted gray, blue, and white oils smudged across black charcoal spill out into an amorphous blob onto a loosely drawn crosshair with PONTIFICATE scrawled in pencil at the top. Though it's easy to make formal parallels between *Pontificate* and the scrawling of her peer Cy Twombly or the object smudges of Jim Dine, instigating these connections creates the very paradox that Sturtevant sought to address (Homes 2005).¹⁴

Radical irony or indifference, as Hassan and Roth suggested, were reactions to Cold War culture in the 1950s and 1960s. The rapidly expanding consumer culture, mass media, and commercialism in the Euro-US context after WWII would also drive reactions against

stylization and spectacle—and were also linked to the increasingly common interest in appropriation as a strategy. As Marxist critics such as Fredric Jameson argued, the rise of television, commercial air travel, the increasing globalization of information, and the rise of late capitalist structures of production and reception also informed the rise of postmodernism (Jameson 1984). Following the uncensored broadcast of the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and 1970s via US network television, many artists, theorists, activists, and broader publics found a growing disconnect between public and private spheres of life. New York artists and filmmakers coming of age during the late 1970s including Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, and Cindy Sherman responded to this tenuous relationship through works that consider the ways in which personal and collective experience are governed by visual culture. Art historian, curator, and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp's seminal "Pictures" essay, written for the exhibition he curated at Artists Space in New York (September 24–October 29, 1977), foregrounded these concerns and would become a milestone moment for postmodernism in the art context (Crimp 1977). The exhibition featured work by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith and represented the first concerted curatorial examination of art addressing the cultural impact of commercial visual media. The relationship between imagery (or "pictures") and the social psyche as mediating factor would later be expanded on in French literary theorist Jean Baudrillard's (1983) *Simulations*, which considers the way in which signs and symbols have replaced original meaning. And though Baudrillard articulated vehement concern for the hyper-simulation appearing within postmodernism, many of these ideas were initially articulated within Saussure's semiotics and Barthes's (1957) text *Mythologies*.

It is worth stressing again that social movements played a key role in the energies of postmodern art movements. The concurrent rise of anti-war and counter-cultural movements in the 1960s provided the impetus of critique against reigning systems, including the rise of postmodern pluralisms against modernist singularity and in pursuit of a more democratic art. Artists seeking this form of democratization include the Swedish-American sculptor Claes Oldenburg, who was best known for his public installations of quotidian objects remade in large-scale and with fabric. Oldenburg's infamous "I Am For" essay written for the 1961 exhibition catalogue *Environments, Situations, Spaces* outlines the artist's interest in "an art that is political-erotic-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum" (Oldenburg 1961).

Postmodernism in the visual arts interrelated with second wave feminisms (1960s–1980s), the gay and lesbian movements and queer theory, and the race-based liberation movements. Activist artists such as Judy Chicago brought feminism to the art school but also to artistic practice, embracing media and modes of making that modernism had exiled (such as craft and performance).¹⁵ The rise and far-reaching consequences of the AIDS epidemic (1980s–1990s) was addressed by prominent queer and performance artists such as Karen Finley (notably, in *We Keep Our Victims Ready*, 1990), Holly Hughes, and Ron Athey.

This activist performance had earlier roots. From the 1950s onward, artists increasingly drew on performance art arguably as a way of materializing their political and personal concerns, from Gutai in Japan and US-based action painting in the 1950s to Happenings and Fluxus in the late 1950s and 1960s, to Viennese Actionism and participatory art of the 1960s and 1970s see Jones 1998; Vergine 1974/2000). From the late 1960s onward, performance and body art had been increasingly mobilized to activist ends. While body and performance art arguably overlap, for example they share the primacy of physicality, body art was initially a name attributed by feminist art historians to specific types of performance art that foregrounded the body itself. The historical impetus for performance art was activist, as noted, but also aimed at promoting the dematerialization of art as an oppositional stance against the growing commodification of the art object.¹⁶

Looking Back: Late Postmodernism and Post-Postmodernity

The late postmodernisms of the 1980s through the early 1990s would continue to foreground the ontological conditions of subjectivity as well as a concerted examination of its intersections with the emergent US culture wars of the 1990s, which were arguably a backlash to the rising power of feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial thinkers and artists. At the same time, these latter expanded efforts to critique liberalism (or neoliberalism, as it started to be called), late capitalism, and the continuing exclusions and violence against people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ people. Critical race theory became an official theoretical movement. Building on the work of the Négritude movement, and especially the writings of Fanon, Cedric Robinson, Derrick Bell, and a group of emerging legal scholars (including Kimberlé Crenshaw, also a feminist) developed CRT primarily based in a Marxist approach to exploring the intersecting discourses and power structures of race and society, including the law. The CRT scholars established a core insight that outlined race as a social construct built into the structure of Western (particularly American) societies. Postmodern feminisms, often informed by poststructuralism, were equally invested in examining inequities established through heteronormative, patriarchal, and capitalist structures. Feminism during this period located gendered experience within language and power, for example in the work of philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, with her re-readings of de Beauvoir, Foucault, and Lacan, and in Irigaray's arguments on femininity (Butler 1990).¹⁷ Theorists and artists active during this period who sought to bridge critical race theory and feminism produced work foregrounding the intersectionally racialized and gendered subject. This has most notably included the rise of Chicana and Black Feminisms by pertinent contributors such as Cherríe Moraga, bell hooks, Hortense Spillers, and Kimberlé Crenshaw (attributed with coining the term *intersectionality* in 1989, relating to her formative work on developing critical race theory) as well as the growing popularization of indigenous feminisms in work by authors such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (see Crenshaw et al. 1995).

We have seen that, while some postmodernisms had a conservative or even reactionary bent (particularly within architectural practice, where some of the grab bag approaches to appropriation were considered to evacuate cultural specificity in a troubling way), most postmodernisms sought results and pursued ideas complementary to left-wing social movements. The varying theories, artistic practices, and modes of resistance emerging in and beyond this more progressive kind of postmodernism have broadly set out to explore the dimensions of culture and structures of power that continue to inform them. Within regard to this essay, this has encompassed the rise of modernism and cultural sedimentation of modernity, postmodernist reactions against its universalisms, structuralist and poststructuralist assessments of social power, and finally, the postcolonial rejection of Eurocentricity. Given these vast frameworks, I have sought here to provide a circular examination of the historically interconnected terms, goals, and impulses that continue (even in the "post-postmodern" period, if we note that postmodern discourses and debates had petered out by the late 1990s) to inform each of these theoretical and artistic discourses. This post-postmodern position emerged as a shift away from what many in the field felt to be no longer relevant. The term was formally introduced by the American urban planner and right-wing advocate Tom Turner in 1995 as a critical turn away from postmodern disavowals of traditional forms. The term's resemblance to early postmodernist initiatives (namely those hinged between modernism and postmodernism of the 1950s and 1960s), however, has given pause to many theorists regarding its conception as antithetical to postmodernism.¹⁸ Turner's conception of the post-post position and its affiliated offshoots can be seen as both reactionary and hinged on the presumption of white male privilege through the architect's various blog musings.¹⁹

Contemporary (2020s) variations on the postmodern, poststructuralist, and postcolonial debates have similarly undergone transformations due to a rapidly shifting sociocultural and political sphere. The US culture wars of the 1990s, for instance, caused a strong shift in cultural production toward an approach primarily invested in the very material consequences of identity politics. Political issues such as abortion, police violence, personal privacy amidst a booming surveillance state, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic would give rise to a more individualized worldview, fragmenting potential solidarities, as opposed to the energies of earlier movements such as Civil Rights in the United States, which had pulled together diverse coalitions. This polarization of American politics would be a defining feature of the 1990s through the contemporary present and, beyond the post-post dilemma, has yielded prescient theories including posthumanism and cyborg theory.²⁰ These theories have largely informed the shift away from preexisting conceptions of postmodernism to better account for the ways in which technology has contoured or displaced identity. The role of technological shifts in these cultural changes of course includes but is not limited to the advent of the Internet and smartphones becoming commercially available to the general public in the late twentieth century. Parallels can be found between the mainstream induction of digital technology and the Internet (1991) and preceding theories wary of the consequences of a rapidly commodifying visual culture. Postmodern and Marxist media theorists engaged with the sociopolitical and cultural perils of consumerism and its cultures most notably include Baudrillard and Guy Debord. Baudrillard's theorization of a culture of simulation claims that contemporary visual technologies have replaced meaning with symbols, thereby rendering human experience a simulation of reality (Baudrillard 1981/1994). Baudrillard's theories would expand on varying sentiments initially espoused by Debord in his landmark text *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord 1967/1970). Debord's interrogation of capitalism is notable for its critical examination of the spectacle, a commodifiable image bound entirely by the screen, and its devastating consequences. The book remains a seminal text for the Situationist movement prominent in Europe from 1957 through its dissolution in 1972.²¹ The cyclic manner in which many of these ideas preempted the demise of meaning mirrors the historical trajectory of both postmodernism and modernism itself. That is to say that under the pressure of new technologies and social forces the terms by which authority, knowledge, and conceptions of the self are conceived will continue to be altered in the hopes of reformation. And while the figurative death of postmodernism remains a deeply contested concern, its legacies have endured as a pertinent framework through which to reconsider the far-reaching and contemporary legacies of modernity.

Notes

- 1 Many feminists have since identified this phase as both primitivizing women and feminizing Africans. Contemporary interventions such as Khanna (2003) who traces the parallel rise of psychoanalysis and colonialism in greater detail.
- 2 Phenomenology is historically affiliated with the theories of Edmund Husserl at the turn of the century, and later Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For example, see Husserl (1913/1983).
- 3 Early performance art and cabaret developed through the European avant-garde movement Dada (c. 1915–1920s) would actualize a distinctly phenomenological approach to artmaking.
- 4 Freud distinguished the preconscious mind in terms of the subject's awareness of something without actively thinking about it, while the conscious mind is comprised of actively considered thoughts, information, and desires. The unconscious mind, the primary subject of Surrealist inquiry, acts as a reservoir for thought, desires, and memories outside of conscious awareness. The Freudian unconscious is generally comprised of feelings and inclinations that are considered socially taboo, unpleasant, or abject.

- 5 This paper was first given as a lecture in 1936 and first published in 1949, both in French.
- 6 Michelson et al. (1987) illustrates the publication's longstanding commitments to these ideals and, in turn, its vehement criticism of contemporary art practices the authors perceived as being unaware of their own socio-economic conditions—a contradictory position given that many of these writings were contributed by white liberal academics residing in New York, none of whom seemed aware of the specificity of their own point of view.
- 7 While artistic adoptions of the concept of abjection began in the late 1970s and 1980s, it wouldn't be until the 1990s that Western cultural institutions began exhibiting work under the term. The exhibition *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art* at the Whitney Museum in New York in 1993 (with a catalogue by the same name edited by Simon Taylor et al.) would exemplify a growing institutional shift in exhibiting artwork engaged with the abject.
- 8 This multi-series study includes Foucault (1976/1978, 1984/1985, 1986, 2021).
- 9 As a method of inquiry, social, and intellectual movement, critical race theory can be cited as having developed in the late 1980s out of Critical Legal Studies. American Civil Rights advocate and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw and others affiliated with the movement including Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Cheryl Harris, and Mari Matsuda, are notable for originating CRT through texts grounded in critical theory that examined the role of US law in perpetuating racism. Many of these texts were published in the late 1970s through the 1980s and draw from parallel movements including Black Power, Chicano, and radical feminist movements from the 1970s and earlier (1960s). Looser definitions of CRT have more recently come to include the work of many postcolonial and decolonial scholars such as Sylvia Wynter, Walter D. Mignolo, and Edward Said.
- 10 It is important to note that many decolonial critics acknowledge the impossibility of returning to a precolonial past and the pitfalls of homogenizing and/or romanticizing this period. This sentiment similarly obfuscates the complex material and sociopolitical legacies and violence that have taken place throughout varying regions and cultures.
- 11 Amelia Jones would argue in her text *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (1998) that the art critic Harold Rosenberg's opening of the interpretation of abstract expressionism to Existentialist models of thought, which emphasized the process of making (in Pollock especially) allowed a new strand within abstract expressionist high modernism. This was then taken up by Alan Kaprow and others and refigured into performative modes of practice that became central to postmodernism in the 1970s.
- 12 This maxim was coined by Louis Sullivan in the late nineteenth century and would later become central to Bauhaus and other high modernist architects, industrial design, and architectural theorists. Sullivan's sentiment articulates that the shape of a building or object should relate directly to its intended purpose, or function. This is explicitly expressed in Sullivan's text "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," in *Lippincott's Magazine* (1896), 403–409.
- 13 Initially published in *Partisan Review* in 1964 and reprinted many times, including as a book: Sontag (2018).
- 14 It is similarly worth noting that superficial reads of Sturtevant's work, or the reduction of her appropriative efforts to "a copy of a copy" have perpetuated the institutional devaluation of an otherwise deeply critical practice.
- 15 Chicago founded the Feminist Art Program, first in 1970 at Fresno State College in California; she brought the program, which she then co-ran with Miriam Schapiro, to California Institute of the Arts in 1971, where they spearheaded the feminist student project of *Womanhouse* in 1972. The program collectively addressed gender inequities and the mis/underrepresentation of women in the visual arts. See Harper (1985).
- 16 The term's historical trajectory can be found in Jones (1998) and Vergine (1974/2000).

- 17 Butler draws on French philosophical thought (in particular the work of Jacques Lacan and Simone de Beauvoir) to argue that sexual difference is always fluid; Irigaray (1974/1985) argues that systems of language are not shared but organized and maintained to serve male interests.
- 18 Variations and contestations of Turner's use of the term can be located across the work of British scholar Alan Kirby (2006) and cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van de Akker (2010).
- 19 Turner's author archives (2008–) are available to reference on gardenvisit.com.
- 20 Both post-humanist and cyborg theories of the subject—largely informed by feminism and postcolonial theory—have figured within postcolonial works such as Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Night Passage* (2004) and have been written about extensively by feminist cultural theorists such as Donna Haraway, Jennifer González and the American author Octavia Butler. See Minh-ha (2013); Haraway (1991); González (1993); O. Butler (1993).
- 21 The Situationist International (SI) movement was an organized alliance of European avant-garde writers, artists, scholars, and poets. The group was cohered through an anti-capitalist collectivity which drew from preceding Marxist and Surrealist movements.

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GENDER/SEX THEORY

Feminist/Queer/Trans Theory and Trans Embodied Methodologies in Contemporary Art: An Intergenerational Dialogue on the Page

Ace Lehner and Amelia Jones

AL: I want to begin this Dialogue with Amelia Jones with a quote from another writing pair:

Trans Studies have completely transformed and enriched debates in Feminist and Queer Studies. Notions such as cis- and transgender, as well as the variety of options made possible by gender expression, gender presentation, gender identity, gender variance, genderqueer, and gender (self-) determination, have revitalized the debates about the cultural, social, and political constructions of gender in the past and contemporary historical contexts (Miguel and Tobias 2016).

AJ: Ace starts with a powerful quote connecting trans studies to feminist and queer studies. This allows the chapter to move forward by specifying exactly what trans issues and trans scholars and artists have brought to and how they have built on feminist and queer theoretical ideas. Most excitingly, they (Ace Lehner) look at a particular performance by Travis Alabanza to develop their argument about what makes trans theory and method particular. I'm here looking over their shoulder as an earlier generation feminist and queer visual theorist, to insert some historiographic material on feminist and queer theory, with a clear focus on the US context that has dominated in the development of these theories. It is a quintessentially feminist/queer/trans and generous gesture for Ace to give me permission to do so. I am here not to correct or challenge any of their rich insights, but rather to fill in some histories that enrich our understanding of trans activism, art practice, and theory in the 2020s. We write together (as Ace suggested to me) to model the possibilities of cross-pollinating feminist/queer/trans methods.

AL: Taking the embodied experience of self-articulation, a way of being that is at odds with the regime of visibility prevalent in Euro-American culture, trans methods favor the haptic over the ocular, modeling methodological innovations that move away from colonialist and essentializing logic rooted in visual apprehension.¹ A discussion of trans artistic practices and the interventions of trans theories into art and visual culture discourse is necessarily linked to the interventions and discourses of feminist and queer creative and scholarly production, all of which are inextricably linked in the ongoing and tireless work of various constituencies fighting the legacy of colonialism. While trans methods are often viewed as very recent interventions, it's key to note that their methodological interventions and lived political origins have much in common with feminists such as those of the Combahee River Collective, particularly their "Combahee River Collective Statement" (Combahee River Collective 1977/1983), which, as Angela Davis notes, established "Black lesbian/queer, anti-capitalist feminism" (Davis, Dent, Meiners, and Richie 2022, xii), as well as the concept of intersectionality and the work of critical race and feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw 1990/1991).² All of which in nuanced ways challenge legacies of colonialist thought.

AJ: First, to provide some background for Ace's theory of trans as working against models of identity and power based on the visual field or the ocular, I would point to the long history in European-centered cultures of privileging visibility in understanding how we navigate the world. (Warning: this is an extremely schematic version of a very complex history, which I trace in a more detailed way elsewhere, including in my parts of the Introduction in this volume; see also Loveless, Chapter 13 in this volume; Jones 2010, 2012.³) Early modern Europeans developed visual models to substantiate the power of the person at the apex of the field of vision—models literalized by the system of perspective developed in the visual arts in Italy during the fifteenth century and following. By the eighteenth century, these systems were aligned with developing Enlightenment models of individualism and freedom, whereby "man"—in practice, the property-owning white male subject—would be able to secure his natural rights by occupying the "correct" position in this matrix of power. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, building on the c. 1800 Hegelian model of the master–slave relation, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud articulated models for understanding power and agency in relation to class and gender/sexuality (using these terms together as gender/sex or sex/gender indicates an understanding that gender and sexual orientation, while indicating different aspects of how we understand our embodied and desiring selves in the world, are interrelated).⁴ Both theorized how subjects in modern Europe were coming to be positioned in structures of power, and their models (while themselves problematically sexist and racist and homophobic/transphobic) are still hugely important for their explanatory value. Marx's model of commodity fetishism explained how and why human labor (mostly male labor in his model) was being objectified and exploited by alienating this work from the embodied subject. And Freud's model of gender/sex as a psychic and embodied formation provides a map that explains how and why female-identified people in European patriarchy were being systematically disempowered through structures of fetishism and objectification that robbed them of agency.

AL: While Amelia is providing deft historical context of methodological and discursive developments between and among often-overlapping methods and movements of feminist/queer/trans theory, my contribution builds on how each is a crucial component of undoing the legacy of the colonial project and critically engages a contemporary example of feminist/queer/trans creative praxis as co-constitutive of a feminist/queer/trans embodied methodology.

Since the advent of queer theory around 1990 and the galvanizing of a trans movement just over two decades ago, feminist, queer, and trans theoretical models and creative practices have undergone significant shifts. In turn, developments in feminist, queer, and trans movements, methods, and practices have significantly impacted trends and discourses in

the art world and culture—especially in the United States. These movements and methods are interlinked, often overlapping and mutually informative, and coalition building across these spheres has often occurred, mobilizing constituencies to greater political achievements. At the same time, each offers discrete and instructive perspectives and methods applicable to the study of art and culture.

To engage in a robust conversation about how this is transpiring I will discuss the work of performance artist Travis Alabanza and explore their deployment of feminist/queer/trans praxis as a contemporary example of the possibility of an interdisciplinary approach that mobilizes trans identifications, concepts, and methods to denaturalize entrenched colonialist frameworks. After a brief discussion of some of the key interventions of feminist, queer, and trans theory, this chapter will study Alabanza's work, foregrounding how it embodies feminist/queer/trans approaches while simultaneously intervening in some of the basic structures of dissemination and meaning making in contemporary art. To help situate Alabanza's intervention, I invite Amelia to further share her astute observations about feminist methodological advancements since the beginning of the second wave.

Feminism

AJ: Following on and critiquing the models of Marx and Freud, feminist visual theory developed out of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and following in the Euro-American context. This theory both built on and sought to critique these white male-dominant models of fetishization and the positioning of middle-class women in the private sphere of domestic labor. British feminists working in London around 1970, including filmmaker and theorist Laura Mulvey, artist/theorist Mary Kelly, art historian Griselda Pollock, and film theorist Stephen Heath, developed rigorous theories of “sexual difference” to explain but also to interrogate the construction of the female body as an object of male desire in visual culture under patriarchy. Most famously, Mulvey published “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Screen* in 1975, an article that established a firm basis for a critical feminist theory of the “male gaze” dominating mainstream Western culture (Mulvey 1975). The implicitly heteronormative male gaze subjected women to the fetishistic objectification of the presumptively male filmmaker and future viewers. As Ace addresses here, the white dominance of this particular model of feminist visual critique was notable and many BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) feminists articulated critiques of it on this basis, including, from a very early moment, American theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Barbara Smith (a founding member of the Combahee Collective), and bell hooks (see Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; hooks 1981; Smith 1983). Its tendency toward heteronormativity and reductive attention to middle-class experience was also a notable limitation that was addressed from within and without by other feminists (including lesbians and queers, such as Audre Lorde and Gayle Rubin) and, especially in English-speaking contexts such as the United Kingdom and United States (see Rubin's classic writings from the 1970s and following in Rubin 2011; Lorde 2018).

Meanwhile, feminist critics and art historians pointed out the exclusionary logic of how art was being historicized and valued, such that art by artists identified as women, queer, or of color would be viewed as inherently inferior (see e.g. Parker and Pollock 1981; Pollock 1994).⁵ These exclusions function as the institutional versions of the perspectival system of heterosexual male empowerment in Western art and the male gaze built into Hollywood cinema, which Mulvey and others critiqued. In 1992, artist and theorist Lorraine O'Grady summed up these exclusions and also addressed the function of the gaze by focusing on “Olympia's Maid”—the Black woman in the background of

Édouard Manet's canonical *Olympia* (1866)—to theorize how the Black female body so often functions in Western patriarchy as a signifier of otherness to the ideal white female body (the white prostitute in the foreground of the painting): “she is Jezebel *and* Mammy, prostitute and female eunuch ... She is the chaos that must be excised [so that] ... the ‘femininity’ of the white female body is ensured” (O’Grady 1992/2010, 209).

Even as dominant feminist visual theory of the 1990s obsessed over the male gaze and female objectification (in “images of women” critiques), other feminist theorists—coming from a range of fields in the humanities—developed queer theory.⁶ Film theorist Teresa De Lauretis labeled this new body of thinking in a conference in Santa Cruz, California, in 1990, asserting (in the published version of her talk) that queer theory offered feminism “another way of thinking the sexual” (De Lauretis 1991, iv).⁷ Judith Butler, a philosopher, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a literary theorist, became two of the most visible queer feminist theorists, both drawing on theories of performativity from linguistic philosophy and concepts of social performance from anthropology and sociology to develop a model for gender as performance, or queer performativity. As Butler famously argued in her 1988 article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” which was revised into her highly influential 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, “[g]ender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler 1988, 527).⁸ Arguably, Butler could only have articulated this argument in its fleshed-out form in *Gender Trouble* and her subsequent works such as *Bodies that Matter* (1993) by experiencing and thinking about trans-feminine embodiment and performance culture. In particular Butler (and others) commonly built a queer feminist theory in part by focusing on cultural examples such as the BIPOC voguing drag ball scene of 1980s New York documented in the 1991 film *Paris is Burning* (see Jones 2021, 204–205). As Jay Prosser puts it in their groundbreaking book on “transsexuality,” a common term for the condition of bodily modified trans identifications in the 1990s, “[i]n its earliest formulations ... queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of transgender” (Prosser 1998, 21).

AL: Building on the points Amelia just made, trans methods add further insight into the critique of heteropatriarchal structures and their attendant oppressions. To begin to nuance the understanding of heteropatriarchy one might note that its oppressive structure has historically presented obstacles for artists who are not cis male. In other words, heteropatriarchal structures privilege those assigned and raised as male who self-identify as such, while maligning and oppressing (to varying degrees and always intersectionally) women, femme identified people, trans people, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming folks, making it difficult for people who are not cis men to achieve success in dominant art historical canons, often preventing them from achieving blockbuster scale exhibitions at major art institutions, or procuring financial security. Feminist artists, art historians, and curators have made substantive progress, however, in attending to these unjust power structures, producing significant critiques and interventions concerning the exclusionary practices of canonical art history, the art world, and scholarly methodologies while challenging sexism, gender injustice, and discrimination (see e.g. Dimitrakaki 2013; Gouma-Petersen and Mathews 1987; Hemmings 2011; Magenta 1987; McRobbie 2008; Nochlin 1971/1988). At the same time, feminism over the last few decades has undergone rebirths and revitalization, and has experienced some infighting, particularly in addressing myopia around race and class and in relation to trans-femme visibility and the claims of trans exclusionary radical feminists (TERFS) such as Janice Raymond, who viewed trans-feminine discourse, practice, and experience as a threat to her notion of an essential female and/or lesbian experience (see Raymond 1979; Jones 2021, 313). There has also been much discussion around ideas of post-feminism from the 1990s to the 2000s, the most recent of which is Derek Conrad Murray’s observation that post-feminism is not

indicative of the end of feminism but rather a means of marking the emergence of a *new type* of feminism—one that is less interested in critiquing dominant culture than it is in mobilizing a representation of the self through social media as empowered, intersectional, and self-assured (Murray 2015; also see Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2020, 5).⁹ The cultural interventions Murray studies are, in his view, produced for the community of the social media “selfie” creator who is no longer concerned with the earlier feminist method of speaking back to the “male gaze”; such practices, he argues, are often mobilized by young women of color (Murray 2015).

Murray’s article on social media and post-feminism points to a serious lack of attention to a diverse range of female experience in much mainstream feminist visual theory of the 1970s through the 1990s. Similarly, in their 2022 book *Abolition Feminism Now*, Angela Davis and her co-authors remind their readers of the importance of not erasing the diversity and collective energies in the feminist movement, especially the organizing “of young queer people of color whose pivotal labor and analysis is [sic] so often erased” (Davis et al. 2022, xi; also see Combahee River Collective 1977/1983). They also stress the critical necessity for “imaginative and conceptual tools to engage with our contemporary moment” (Davis et al. 2022, xiii). Such intentional and vigilant inclusivity in these recent discourses around the potentialities of post-feminism and abolition feminism (which brings together a critique of the carceral state that disproportionately damages BIPOC lives with an awareness of gender oppression) may help to avoid exclusionary practices in contemporary feminism, while highlighting the complex genealogies of feminism. Moreover, and crucially for the consideration of trans identified people and politics, this type of thinking keeps at bay any potentially problematic and essentialist ideas about gender oppression as rooted in binary frameworks—for example, the transphobic arguments made by Raymond noted earlier. That is to say, rigorous inclusivity ensures attention to trans/feminism, a discourse and activism merging feminist with trans concerns, which has the potential to highlight the fact that postfeminist projects (and feminism) are not necessarily bound to cis women, while also safeguarding against any reinforcing of white supremacy.

Building on Davis et al.’s point, if the feminist project is genuinely concerned with dismantling the structures of gender oppression, gender itself must be viewed as part of the violent legacy of the colonial project and, as such, as always interconnected with numerous other damaging power structures. Thus, for example, influential gender theorists Talia Mae Bettcher, Kate Bornstein, and Julia Serano have mobilized trans/feminist methods to push feminism to be more inclusive such that it addresses concerns among younger generations debating and experiencing gender in complex and intersectional ways. Indeed, in so doing, they have been able to attend to how misogyny and heteropatriarchy—in relation to class, race/ethnicity, and other identifications positioning subjects in today’s world—shape and impact all lives. Bettcher has thus worked to debunk the pervasive “trapped in the wrong body” narrative of trans lives, while also showcasing how stereotypes of trans people as deceivers reinvests in the binary gender regime (Bettcher 2014). Bornstein has been instrumental in forwarding non-binary, trans identities via interdisciplinary praxis (Bornstein 1994, 2013, 2019). And, coining the term *transmisogyny*, Julia Serano’s scholarship has been invaluable in understanding how trans folks have been framed culturally via the gazes of those conditioned by heteropatriarchy, misogyny, and transphobia (Serano 2016, 71; for more on current directions in trans feminism, see cárdenas 2010; Egaña and Solá 2016). Building on these interventions Moya Bailey coined the term *misogynoir*, which describes the intersection of “racism, antiblackness, and misogyny” (Bailey and Trudy 2018; also see Bailey 2021). In turn, *misogynoir* has since been deployed by Elías Cosenza Krell to create nuanced discourse around the interrogation of *racialized transmisogyny* (Krell 2017).

Queer

AL: Often attributed, as Amelia notes earlier, in its first usage to a lecture by Teresa De Lauretis at a feminist conference at the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1990, “queer theory” as a methodological approach emerged from feminist visual theory (which had reached an impasse by ignoring non-heteronormative identifications and desires). But it stemmed as well from the political and creative activism in the United States coalescing around the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, and the galvanizing of queer identified folks around various issues of injustice impacting people across differences but united by discrimination around their sexual and gender identities. Black queer feminist theorist Cathy J. Cohen described the potentiality of queer as a theoretical concept in the 1990s as follows:

[F]or those of us who find ourselves on the margins, operating through multiple identities and thus not fully served or recognized through traditional single-identity-based politics, *theoretical conceptualizations* of queerness hold great political promise. For many of us, the label “queer” symbolizes an acknowledgment that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multisited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility (Cohen 1997, 440).

Mobilizations of queer as an identity, a mode of scholarly inquiry, and a creative and political force of resisting assimilation have augmented and shifted over the last decades in response to various political urgencies and injustices challenging queer and LGBTQIA+ constituencies. For example, the impetus for queer liberation in the United States was bound up with sex work positivity and class consciousness, was against transmisogyny, and was not only anti-racist but multicultural. The now iconic uprisings at Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco in 1966 and Stonewall in New York City in 1969 were led by sex workers, working-class folks, trans folks (many of whom were femmes), and people of color. Meanwhile, in Canada, Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau decriminalized homosexuality in 1967. And in the United Kingdom, under the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, same-sex activity between men over the age of twenty-one became permissible if the parties were in private. The first meeting of the UK Gay Liberation Front occurred in 1970, inspired by the Stonewall uprising. And just one year after Stonewall, leading figures in the New York City rebellion, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). The directive of STAR was to support trans and marginally housed and unhoused young people and sex workers. Folks who were central to the birth of queer liberation were persecuted by mainstream culture and were already being marginalized by certain factions within the queer community.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic and negligent and regressive political leadership exacerbated the complex creative praxis deployed by queers over the next decades. In the United States and the United Kingdom, artists responded to the ensuing 1990s “culture wars” in ways that rocked the contemporary art world and centered ever more queerly radical aesthetics. Artists such as Félix González-Torres harnessed the slipperiness of minimalism to insert gorgeous work about queer, love, desire, intimacy, HIV/AIDs, and loss into a mainstream culture that dared not speak the words aloud. Queer Nation and Act Up fused activism, art, graphic design, and performance, resulting in lasting political and creative innovation—developing key images such as the iconic and profound silence = death logo. Nan Goldin created profound photographs of trans and queer love, working poor glamour in relation to the communities formed around drug use via a vernacular photographic and diaristic imaging of her life, but she also curated an unprecedented group show about HIV/AIDs entitled

Witness: Against Our Vanishing at Artists Space in New York City in 1989. And of course, there is the incomparable oeuvre of Ron Athey, who was demonized in the United States during the 1990s culture wars; Amelia has written astutely about Athey's work and curated an excellent retrospective of his life work, *Queer Communion: Ron Athey* (in 2021 at Participant Inc., New York, and Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), which was deeply moving (Jones 2006; Jones and Campbell 2020). Queer artists in the battle with HIV/AIDS and social and political negligence recentered disruption, perversion, and necessary subversive qualities of queer but with embodied, visceral urgency, forever changing contemporary art.

In the 1990s, queer representations in the mainstream in the United Kingdom and United States underwent some significant shifts. The founding of Chanel 4 in the United Kingdom brought a commitment to an increased diversity of voices. The eight-part series *Queer as Folk* (1999–2000) would have a major cultural impact and the US version, a television series also called *Queer as Folk*, ran for five years from (2000–2005) and was part of a wave of television shows featuring queer characters during this period, including *Will and Grace* (1998–2006) and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003–2007). These representations made major inroads for certain forms of gay acceptance in the mainstream, likely part of the cultural sea change that opened the door for marriage equality in the United States (a bill for marriage equality, which significantly also protects interracial marriage, was passed in 2022). But also, these mainstream representations demonstrated a dominant cultural impulse to create and incorporate white supremacist gay norms, featuring almost entirely able-bodied, well-dressed, financially secure, cis, male, and predominantly masculine, white majority characters.

Efforts to support the work of queer artists and queer culture have also resulted in the founding of now iconic institutions featuring LGBTQ+ art and culture, such as the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art in New York City in 1987 and the Schwules Museum Berlin in 1985, as well as a burgeoning number of archives related to LGBTQ+ culture.¹⁰ And there are a growing number of annual queer art exhibitions committed to the diversity and radicality of queerness, such as the National Queer Arts Festival in San Francisco, which was founded in 1998.

More recently, blockbuster shows at major institutions have explored concepts of queerness and gender. In 2010–2011 the National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC, a highly conservative venue, featured *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*; in 2017–2018 the New Museum in New York presented a blockbuster show titled *Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon*; in 2019 the Hayward Gallery in London ran an exhibition entitled *Kiss My Genders* and the Oakland Museum of California showcased *Queer California: Untold Stories*.¹¹ The possibilities of queer continue to resonate and have a broad impact, intersecting with various discourses and shaped by those who deploy it. Queer creative interventions continue to push the bounds of queerness forward, holding its founding tenants central. Art historian David Getsy has noted: “[t]he activist stance of ‘queer’ was developed as a mode of resistance to the oppression and erasure of sexual minorities. Importantly, however, it was concurrently posited as a rejection of assimilationism proposed by many gay and lesbian communities who aspired to be just ‘normal’.” He continues on to describe the mobilizing capacity of queer as an anti-assimilationist tactic that calls into question various systems of oppression (from politics to police) while also modeling ways of being and doing that support “self-determination” across differences (Getsy 2016, 12). Bearing in mind the origins of queer and its contemporary resonances, it is critical to recall that queer is most significant when it is, as Cohen suggests, attending to oppressive systems,

especially race and gender, and when it remains particularly attuned to interrogating norms and remains vigilant around issues of visibility.

Recently, significant scholarly interventions in queer theory and queer approaches to art and visual culture have kept these concerns of queerness centered. Notable here is the work of scholars, including but not limited to Derek Conrad Murray and his work on queering post-Black art, Alpesh Patel's notions of doing art history queerly, and investigations into creative praxes of queer failure by the likes of Jack Halberstam and Tina Takemoto (see Halberstam 2011; Murray 2016; Patel 2017; Takemoto 2016). These are much-needed and timely interventions working to de-essentialize various identities and to facilitate rethinking of structures and ideologies often taken for granted or as given.

AJ: This is a nice summary of the ways in which feminist and queer theory have, from their beginnings, been pressured from within in relation to their tendency to privilege cis (non-trans), white, and middle-class issues and points of view. Cathy Cohen's article was truly revolutionary in foregrounding this critique. And, notably, she cites the Combahee River Collective, whom Ace also notes earlier, in mounting her argument about attending to multiple aspects of "queer" when articulating a theoretical model around it and in arguing for a more nuanced queer theory that:

[deploys] *integrated* analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face (Combahee River Collective 1977, as cited in Cohen 1997, 26).

Cohen builds on the Combahee argument about feminism as well to argue about queer theory: "heteronormativity interacts with institutional racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation to define us in numerous ways as marginal and oppressed subjects" (Cohen 1997, 31). And, ultimately, she points out an uncomfortable fact: that many BIPOC feminists and queers in the 1990s (here, the United States is the context) were finding it difficult to embrace queer theory's particular conceptualization of gender/sex and identity as fluid and mutable—noting how this was occurring because most queer theorists came from privileged class backgrounds and didn't see the ways in which "some traditional social identities and communal ties can, in fact, be important to one's survival"; she concludes, powerfully, by noting: "Further, a queer politics that demonizes all heterosexuals discounts the relationships—especially those based on shared experiences of marginalization—that exist between gays and straights, particularly in communities of color" (Cohen 1997, 34).

Cohen's arguments were and remain crucial in pointing out that contemporary forms of heteronormativity, like those of patriarchy, have their roots in white supremacist ideologies, which deploy various structures of state regulation (such as bathroom laws and rules around heterosexual marriage) to contain and control unruly queer as well as feminist/feminine and especially trans subjects, especially those from BIPOC communities. Any liberatory movement, then, must interrogate structures of power that are inherently intersectional to make any progress in challenging the oppression, marginalization, disempowerment—or even bodily violations—of women and LGBTQ+ people.

Trans

AL: Absolutely, and it becomes key to nuance our perspective, to move from seeing these oppressive frameworks as separate and intersecting to a view of them as constitutive parts of an overarching oppressive ideology. And one that is inextricable from maintaining

hierarchies based on embodied morphologies. Much like the above-discussed feminist and queer theoretical and lived projects, trans methods provide frameworks for challenging problematic essentialisms and the gross mistreatment of people based on an assessment of our visible or putative anatomical differences while challenging the foundational framework of white supremacy. Trans methods are crucial for a critical dismantling of outmoded ways of conceiving of bodies in relation to representation and visual culture. The reductive and culturally pervasive belief that seeing is somehow equivalent to knowing is a residue of the colonialist agenda, as Amelia notes earlier, and the pervasiveness of its long legacy is deeply troubling. In contemporary discourse in the Euro-American context, trans is generally understood as an identification linked to someone who does not identify with/as the gender they were assigned at birth.¹² However, while useful as a broad generalization, this definition is limited in scope. Trans identity is often also a rejection of the gender a person is raised to align with, and a rejection of gendered treatment they have received throughout their life. Additionally, there are plenty of instances in which people are assigned a sex/gender position at birth but may be intersex and raised as another gender, and there are various other complex iterations of gender rearing that do not fall neatly into the reductive description of the “gender assigned at birth.” It is important also to note that the pressure to conform and perform within binary gender structures is not only exerted at birth or during childhood; trans people are forced to engage in battles and negotiations with essentialized gender regimes throughout life. Indeed, trans-feminist scholars and artists have recently explored how gender as a category surveils and polices. Finally, it is vital to recognize that the reductive and essentialized binary gender structure prevalent in the Euro-American context reduces the gender and self-expressive possibilities of all people, not just those of trans experience, so trans liberation also becomes about the liberation of all people from the oppressive and racist strictures of the colonialist legacy of gender prevalent in Euro-American contexts today.

Trans as a methodology, rooted in an intimate understanding of trans identity, offers a mode of thinking about visibility in a way that denaturalizes the essentialist impulse to reductively assign identity in relation to bodily appearance.¹³ Trans identity rejects the assumed truth of the visible while also deploying modes of interpretation that engage with binary gender to varying degrees and with diverse deployments and goals. Trans methodologies often divest from the strategy of suturing meaning to surface appearance, exploring how meaning is made in complex embodied encounters. Trans methods and ways of being encourage the wholesale rejection of the simplistic notion that, via perceiving a body, one can ascribe meaning or identity to that person or assume knowledge about what or whom one might be looking at: this is an essential methodological intervention. Marquis Bey has insightfully argued that “[t]he dominant logic of identity, [wherein] one that assumes ‘race’ and ‘gender’ are fixed and knowable, needs not only troubling but interrogative obliteration” (Bey 2022, 95). And trans theorist Jay Prosser has articulated trans methods that move beyond the inaccurate belief that seeing equals knowing by emphasizing embodiment. Prosser notes that trans embodiments deeply inform trans methods, and trans lives are not based on moving away from one type of firmly identified body into another (for example, from assigned female at birth to male, as the binary and linear trans narratives established by the medical and psychiatric industries insist upon); instead, trans people move further *into* an embodiment that itself confuses fixed and binary gender as visible and thus knowable (Prosser 1998). Indeed, beyond simply problematizing the linear, binary goal-orientated model, trans experiences and creative praxis often do things beyond the logic of binaries and linear trajectories, as we will explore in our discussion of the work of Travis Alabanza.

AJ: This articulation of what is *specific* to trans theory, as it builds on and challenges aspects of feminist and queer theory, is a great overview. What intrigues me about Prosser, too, is that they identify and critique two tendencies in queer theory: the obsession with

trans bodies (as noted earlier) but also the tendency to conflate trans bodies with what Jack Halberstam has called “bodily plasticity” or gender fluidity tout court (see Prosser 1998, 32).¹⁴ As Prosser concludes in their critique of Butler’s model, “there are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to *be*.” They might “become a woman,” for example, through “substantial medical intervention, personal tenacity, economic security, [and] social support,” but, importantly, they may well not experience their sexed embodiment as performative (Prosser 1998, 32–33).¹⁵ The goal for transsexuals, per Prosser, is *not* to evade being identified visually or being aligned with a fixed gender but to embody the gender with which they identify.

Expanding on Ace’s earlier point, trans forces us to understand gender/sex identification and experience as fully embodied, not just visually determined by apparent anatomy or bodily gestures or attributes. If gender for the “images of women” feminist theorist from the 1970s was strategically reduced through the model of fetishism to a category of visibility that in patriarchy aligns the female body as an object of the “male gaze,” disempowering those bodies identified (visibly) as female, and gender for Butler and other queer feminist theorists of the 1990s was a performative with only circumstantial attachment to anatomical bodily features, then the trans subject doesn’t fit into gender at all.

AL: I appreciate how Amelia notes that “the trans subject doesn’t fit into gender at all.”

This is a crucial observation. Trans provides a new understanding of gender, representation, and identity and a significant methodological shift. Trans methods open a space to consider identity as having an unprecedented relationship to embodiment. Or at least one we are less familiar with in the United States due to the lingering ideological framing based on long problematic histories of the privileging of sight, as discussed earlier. For example, you may look at a given person and want to refer to them as “he,” and yet this person may tell you that their pronouns are she/they. In self-articulating her/their gender identity, she/they not only reject what is put on her/them by binary gender ideology but she/they are challenging the conception of identity and representation we have been trained to take as a given. In other words, this scenario invites us to rethink how we understand who people are and prompts us to divest from the privileging of sight.

AJ: Thereby this lived example of gender/sex requires new methods that move in different directions from those deemed crucial for feminist and queer cultural theory. Ace’s examination of the work of Travis Alabanza, following, grounds this argument about trans methodology.

Trans Embodied Methodologies/Racism, Gender Oppression, and Travis Alabanza’s *Burgerz*

AL: Travis Alabanza is a Black British, non-binary trans femme artist, writer, and performer. Alabanza grew up in working-class Bristol, England, and is currently based in London.¹⁶ Alabanza defines embodiment in the following way: “When I do what I want to do, that makes me feel good, and it connects all the dots, and I don’t care so much about the outside. I make choices that feel good and radiate” (Alabanza in Lehner 2021, 45). This concept of embodiment relies entirely on an internal feeling and transmitting this self-articulation, and self-love, outward. It reflects a trans embodied experience inhabited by subjects who are not concerned with representation, visual performance, or the interpretation of one’s physical or performative aesthetics by any outside observer. (The experience may only be fleeting as it flies in the face of various external pressures and hostilities.) But what is key here is that trans embodiment, in this sense, is about a haptic understanding—one of touch, embodiment, and materiality—that places value on internal feelings and self-knowledge. Jack Halberstam’s conception of trans embodiment

illuminates this notion. He writes, “[h]apticality organizes meaning, knowing, and seeing in ways that exceed rational sense-making enterprises and instead force the viewer to examine their own relations to truth and authenticity” (Halberstam 2018). If we consider notions of “truth,” and rational sense-making in the Euro-American context or in cultures ideologically descended from the colonial project as intertwined with visibility, as discussed by Amelia briefly earlier, then a haptic or embodied understanding of self defies the visual regime. Turning away from the belief that one can ascribe meaning and value to bodies based on visual assessment, trans embodied ways of living and thinking invest in self-articulation, starting from internal knowledge about ourselves and expressing that knowledge outward into the world. Prioritizing inward self-knowledge reworks how we understand identity and its relation to visibility.

Alabanza’s critically acclaimed performance piece *Burgerz* (see Figures 28.1 and 28.2) has toured internationally, selling out shows from Sao Paulo, Brazil to HAU Berlin and winning the Edinburgh Fringe Total Theatre Award in 2019.¹⁷ I was fortunate to have the opportunity to see the show live when it first toured in the United States in the spring of 2022 at the Jackie Liebergott Black Box Theatre in Boston. In the opening sequence of the performance Alabanza recounts the impetus for the piece. Their idea for *Burgerz* was sparked by an event that was so heinous and absurd that it stuck with them in a way they could not shake. Under dim lights, alone on stage wearing coveralls and boots, Alabanza recounts to the audience how they were walking across the very busy Waterloo Bridge one London rush-hour afternoon when they were accosted by an airborne burger. It struck them on their shoulder, and while mayonnaise dribbled down their jumper, they heard the assailant yell at them from a passing car, “Tranny!”¹⁸ The absurdity of the assault, coupled with the fact that, by their estimation, a hundred people saw and no one did anything, silently sanctioning this act of violence, sparked Alabanza’s creation of *Burgerz*. As Alabanza puts it: “What happens when you’re trans and harassed is that often no one outside is having your back. You’re kind of seen as deserving of the violence you experience because you’re gender non-conforming. People go ‘look at that freak over there’” (as cited in Necati 2018).¹⁹ Determined to transform the transphobic assault into a platform for interrogating the motivation behind the event and its complex emotional implications, Alabanza, with *Burgerz*, critically and skillfully explores the ever-shifting



FIGURE 28.1 Travis Alabanza, *Burgerz*, performance still, October 25, 2018, Hackney Showroom, London. Courtesy of Holly Revell.



FIGURE 28.2 Travis Alabanza, *Burgerz*, performance still, Oct 25, 2018. Hackney Showroom, London. Courtesy of Holly Revell.

discourse of the interconnection of gender oppression and racism, as well as highlighting the systemic and active obscuring of trans and gender-nonconforming histories.

Standing alone center stage, Alabanza expounds: “If I become obsessed with how the burger works, how it flies, how it smells, and how it lands, then maybe I will have some agency over it. Maybe I will feel like I was once in control.” Using the burger as a metaphor to satirize culturally constructed binary gender roles, Alabanza goes on to describe how the burger must follow specific aesthetic rules: “The burger bun must be round. Top heavy, bottom light, one bigger than the other. Always bigger than the other, big holding small in place. Top to bottom. We are not aiming for equal.” Alabanza is transforming the burger into a symbol for the pressure to conform to the reductive dictates of binary gender.

At one point in the performance, Alabanza recounts how trans and gender-nonconforming people used to be revered in various indigenous cultures around the globe before the advent of colonization. While preparing a burger atop a massive kitchen island located centrally on set, Alabanza expounds:

Two thousand years ago, there were gods that looked like me
Worshipped in their plurality
You know, not cast away, cast side, castrated,
But seen in their plurality as strength, not a hindrance,
Hijra—South Asia, Bakla—Philippines, Kathoey—Thailand, Femminiello—Italy.
(Alabanza 2022, 559)

In this powerful segment of the performance, Alabanza poignantly calls attention to four distinct gender constituencies outside of, beyond, and predating European systems of binary gender oppression. By excavating and disseminating this knowledge, Alabanza challenges the often-cited false belief perpetrated in some LGBTQ+ discourse as well as in mainstream culture in the United States that trans and gender-nonconforming people are contemporary phenomena; instead, this history of precolonial non-binary people exposes the cultural specificity of the binary gender system dominant in locations descended from the colonial project. The gender binary is thus shown to have required the deliberate and systemic erasure of gender diversity from public knowledge. Or in the words of Jian Neo Chen, “[t]rans people of color not only survived and opposed white cis-hetero-patriarchal settler society and state regimes. They created ways to thrive and build kinship at the edges of transgender, queer, women’s, immigrant, ethnic, indigenous, and racial communities shaped by ongoing histories of

subjugation—communities that often perceived them as internal threats to social fabrics already under attack” (Chen 2019, 7). Paralleling Jian Neo Chen’s understanding of how gender and race interrelate in the European colonial project, Alabanza’s feminist/queer/trans praxis highlights that the binary gender system does not just intersect with racism; instead, it is a crucial part of the racist colonial project.

To understand Alabanza’s intervention, it is helpful to think along with Judith Butler’s 2004 theorization of “undoing” gender.²⁰ Butler observes that the determination of gender is highly informed by visibility, and there is a point at which certain subjects’ genders either fail to fit or exceed culturally sanctioned gender parameters (Butler 2004, 69).²¹ Building on this recent work of Butler, gender can be understood as a matrix of intelligibility, where those appearing outside the standards of binary gender are viewed as unworthy of life (on this point, see Butler 1993, 2004).²² When people embody gender in ways that appear incongruent with the reductive binary gender paradigm, their disruption of visible gender norms endangers them. When such corporealities are also racialized, their lives are increasingly at risk.²³ As Alabanza makes plain, however, the gender binary is culturally and temporally specific. Throughout history and around the globe, gender has existed in various forms, often more expansive than the binary norm prevalent today in European-inflected cultures.

Thinking along with Alabanza via an anti-racist and decolonial feminist/queer/trans perspective, one can see the ideological and literal policing of gender taking place via racist cultural norms that have been and continue to be a facet of the Euro-American nation state, established with the colonial project, and maintained through legislation, medicine, and visual regimes. The history of Euro-American eugenics testifies to the violence of this regime. In her 2003 book *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism*, Nancy Ordover thus writes:

It would be impossible to excavate the roots and the reach of the medicalization of queers without an understanding of scientific racism and other eugenics endeavors. Not only were they ideologically tethered, but they had the same champions and often the same victims (Ordover 2003, xxi).

Given Ordover’s argument that queer in this sense may be understood as anyone disrupting binary gender and biological sex binary essentialisms, trans people would clearly be included in this regime. I would note further that, in reviewing the history of colonization over many centuries, one cannot ignore how the racist logic of colonialist ideologies has been key to maintaining a cis white supremacist, heteropatriarchal society. In other words, the enduring legacy of racism is tightly bound to the logic of gender oppression.

AJ: Absolutely, Ace. I discuss this issue of precolonial gender nonconforming identifications, specifically in the context of the Pacific, in my new book *In Between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (Jones 2021, 248–349). In the Pacific, similar indigenous gender/sex identifications existed before colonization—each Pacific Island culture has its own name and form of, for example, people initially identified by others as male who take on female tasks and bodily attributes. That said, applying Anglophone and American concepts of “queer” or “trans” to these complexly identified people is problematic. Māori artist and theorist Tāwhanaga Nopera, whom I interviewed for the book while researching in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, admitted to me that Westerners would likely identify them as queer or trans, but that they also refuse these categorizations as colonizing. They noted to me that they identify as *takatāpui*, a precolonial term indicating “oneness” with another person of the same gender, recently revived through revisionist histories recapturing Māori ways before colonization, and through Kaupapa Māori theory, a decolonizing body of thought based on Māori principles and developed by Māori thinkers such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Jones 2021, 273–275).

Most importantly, I learned from my research in the Pacific that the most innovative scholars and artists in places such as Aotearoa New Zealand do not see colonialism as a one-way street. Lee Wallace, for example, understands that Europeans, in sailing through and colonizing the Pacific in the eighteenth century, formed their understandings of modern sexuality (including their invention of homosexuality at this time) through encounters with the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands: the “discovery” of Polynesian gender/sex complexities, she notes, “redefined the possibilities for sexual variance within European masculinity” (Wallace 2003, 1). The Euro-American (white) concept of homosexuality, which Michel Foucault establishes as having come into being around 1800, was thus constituted *through* Europeans’ contact with gender liminal Polynesians in the century before. If we were to follow this theory through, we could articulate a much more nuanced theory of gender/sex that allowed for non-Euro-American variations.

AL: I love that Amelia shares her research experience about gender in Aotearoa. Not only is gender more expansive in other geographic and temporal locations, but it highlights that gender is constituted cross-culturally! Gender is continually morphable, in the frameworks in which we both play and perform gender, and it is always in conversation with whom we are interacting on both micro and macro scales.

Feminist/Queer/Trans Creative Praxis as Intervention

AL: In another vignette, Alabanza now wearing a knee length bright blue jumper, a pink apron, and pumps to match, asks if anyone in the audience will help them. They stipulate, however, that “I think I need a man, a white cisgender man.” After going through a satirical and entertaining monologue about how ridiculous it is to need the help of a white cisgender man and not be able to find one when they are so infrequently needed, Alabanza at last selects one of only three men who raised their hands to be of assistance. Once on stage, following a brief introduction, Alabanza asks the young man to tape two hamburger buns to Alabanza’s chest on the outside of their jumper, placed where breasts would be if Alabanza had them.

Punctuated by the periodic *SSSSHHHHHHKKKKKT!* sound of hot pink duct tape being pulled off the roll and the physical awkwardness of the young man trying desperately to tape the buns onto Alabanza’s chicly dressed torso, Alabanza discusses the pressures they feel to modify their appearance to conform with binary gender norms. In order to obtain breasts, they note that it would require them to partake in the medical model of trans experience in order to gain access to hormone therapies. I would stress here that this avenue would often be a traumatic event in and of itself, as navigating Western health-care system as a trans person is an overwhelmingly scary, disenfranchising, and often-traumatic experience; this trauma is one of many ways that trans folks are prevented from having autonomy over our own bodies.²⁴ Alabanza shares: “I’m not sure if I need to have them [breasts] for something as boring as safety,” implying that if their gender more precisely replicated an essentialized presentation that fit the binary they would be less likely to be attacked or violated. They go on to say that they continue to resist the pressure but feel it regularly (Alabanza 2022). Here Alabanza considers how gender dysphoria—a term codified in Western medicine and applied to trans people, implying that they experience psychological distress because they do not align with gender norms—is not (as is commonly thought) something that comes from an internal feeling relating to failure to replicate binary gender norms, but rather it is inflicted by external pressure on folks to fit within the binary gender regime.

Alabanza's work also notably dovetails with what trans theorist and Black studies scholar C. Riley Snorton has noted: that the canonization of the first trans celebrity in the 1950s, Christine Jorgensen, as the "good transsexual" set up a framework in which Caucasian trans women gained an "acceptable subject position," one that was contingent on embodying narrowly prescribed cultural norms—specifically, cisnormative binary gender appearance to reflect white supremacist ideas of womanhood as closely as possible. More pointedly, Snorton notes that, through "whiteness," trans women have been "sanitized" (Snorton 2017, 140–143). Making Jorgensen into a celebrity set a narrowly defined visualization of trans identity and established the only acceptable appearance for trans corporeality, a model that continues today, marginalizing, erasing, and endangering those who do not reflect the entrenched ideal or norm of trans-femme visibility.²⁵ Embodying a racialized gender outside of the bounds of acceptable transness and gender embodiments while creating a critically engaged praxis of interrogating parameters and delimitations of the binary gender matrix, Alabanza's trans/feminist/queer critical race praxis is a significant intervention into visual culture, visual culture history, scholarship, social and political discourses, and contemporary art.

The absurdity, tension, vulnerability, pain, and humor packed into Alabanza's performance transmit the complex feelings and pressures on trans people to comply with the aesthetics of dominant cultural gender norms. It must be stated that these pressures impact all of us (trans, cis, and beyond), but they are exerted and felt to varying degrees, usually in terms of the person's relative alignment with norms (whiteness or middle-classness, for example). By inviting a cis Caucasian man to duct tape hamburger buns onto their chest, Alabanza explores what it might mean to have breasts, while underscoring the racism, heteropatriarchy, cis and white supremacy that are result from the threat that trans people pose to systems and individuals attached to binary gender norms.

In *Black Trans Feminism*, Marquis Bey writes, "[n]either blackness nor transness nor the implicit 'woman' as the subject of feminism is tied to a specific kind of body or identity"; instead, Bey continues, they are all "inflections of mutinous subjectivities that have been captured and consolidated into bodily legibilities" (Bey 2022, 9). Bey goes on to write that to be "legible to the predominating schema of intelligibility, one must always have the breadth of their subjectivity reduced, distilled" (Bey 2022, 10). As Alabanza shifts their embodiment campily, playfully, and collaboratively, both in control and at the mercy of the act performed by their one-time collaborator, they highlight how they embody aesthetics outside the limits of the prevailing parameters of legibility in their geographic and temporal location. In cultures descended from the colonial project, breasts are a corporeal attribute conflated with ideas of femininity and womanhood.²⁶ If Alabanza had breasts, people encountering them might be able to fit them more easily into the box of femininity and thus grant Alabanza more safety, in that they would be less likely to disrupt the binary gender matrix. Alabanza uses the stage as a means to launch this experience of embodied existence into a broader consciousness, giving a platform to express the pressures they feel from mainstream culture to be legible, to essentialize themselves. Performing a possible iteration of themselves with obviously and humorously fake breasts, it seems clear that Alabanza has no interest in transforming themselves into a gendered corporeality that is not demonstrative of their gender identity to pursue the increased possibility of social safety. Their apparent commitment to embodying their internal self-knowledge outweighs the external pressure exerted on them to conform, exemplifying Halberstam's argument about hapticality and trans experience cited earlier.

The scene invites us to consider why one might assume that Alabanza's flat chest or other bodily attributes would bar them from femininity (or any identity category). Alabanza's performance puts trans embodiment center stage, asking: *Why do the questions that trans embodied practices raise not extend more broadly? Why might one view the appearance of the cis Caucasian male collaborator to be unquestionably male? Or*

how, for example, does Alabanza's collaborator know he is a man? Alabanza asks him this precise question later, and he strains to find a definitive answer.

Alabanza's performance critically interrogates mainstream understandings of trans embodiment, skillfully rejecting a belief in the truth of the visible and highlighting the absurdity of such an idea. The performance in this way de-essentializes identity (as gendered/raced simultaneously) while providing a praxis for new ways of thinking about identity and visibility as existing in a complex dialectical relationship with meaning and identification or what José Muñoz famously called disidentification (or what he calls "recycling and rethinking coded meaning"; Muñoz 1999, 31).²⁷ Alabanza invites viewers to ask how and why embodied attributes have cultural meanings attached to them and how we might play with these assumed significations and not take them as true, objective, and unwavering. Alabanza's work is exemplary of a feminist/queer/trans praxis that necessitates the development of a gender/sex theory interrelating the insights of critical race, trans, queer, and feminist methods of analysis. It is to such praxes that we must look to update visual theory such that it can address the complexities of embodied human experience.

For a feminist/queer/trans methodological discourse to be relevant in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is thus critical to work with an awareness of how gender/sex is overdetermined by factors such as race, ethnicity, and geographical location—to work toward the dismantling of the legacy of the colonialist project. As observed in the work of Alabanza, taking a critical race and indigenous trans/queer/feminist perspective when studying critical race and indigenous trans/feminist/queer work as praxis not only aids in challenging cis white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, binary gender systems and ways of thinking, but it results in the elaboration of more engaging, nuanced, complex, diverse contemporary methodologies that speak to lived experience today. Perhaps most important to a feminist/queer/trans methodology is a commitment seeking out an ever-expansive repertoire of approaches to dismantling the legacy of colonialism and the racism structurally embedded in all understandings and experiences of the gendered/sexed body within the post-colonized world. The next step might be to ask: how can such a nuanced theory of gender/sexuality incorporate and deploy discourses around classism, ableism, and neurodiversity as we continue to move studies of art and visual culture forward?

Notes

- 1 Forwarding the term Euro-American in this context, I highlight that the ideological framing of the ontology of a notion of the "West" is inherently problematic. It is necessary to work to undo the ideologies of Euro-American culture that claim a false sense of natural or given when, in fact, Euro-American ideologies are deeply bound with legacies of colonization and oppression achieved in large part via the cultural privileging of sight. This thinking builds on the insightful writing of Jones (2012).
- 2 It's important to note that, while tracing movements in the Euro-American context as a means of critical interrogation in aims of dismantling oppressive structures from within, trans becomes a necessary construct in response to colonialist framework, but binary gender is what is "new."
- 3 For an overview and collection of feminist visual theory, see Jones (2012).
- 4 I address this use of "gender/sex" or "gender/sexuality" in Jones (2021), 1.
- 5 More recent exhibitions and catalogues have acted as correctives to this situation; see Morris and Hockley (2017).
- 6 On "images of women" critique and its shortcomings, see Pollock (1977).
- 7 I address the genealogy of queer theory and its relationship to feminism at length in chapter 5, "Queer," of Jones (2021, 186–247); also see Jones (2014).

- 8 I discuss the genealogy of the idea of gender performance and the work of Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others in chapters 2 and 3, “Performativity” and “Relationality,” of Jones (2021, 34–82, 83–130).
- 9 For more on debates with “GirlPower,” see Bae (2011); some scholars noted that the concept of “girl power” was often tied to consumer power and not at all about reworking gender inequity.
- 10 These museums complemented previously existing and new LGBTQ+ research institutions including: ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, founded in 1952 and acquired by the University of Southern California libraries in 2010; Mazer Lesbian Archives (founded in 1981 in Oakland, California, and moved to Los Angeles later in the 1980s, where it is now affiliated with University of California, Los Angeles; GLBT History Museum in San Francisco since 1985; the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria since 2007; IHLIA LGBT Heritage Archive in Amsterdam since 1999; and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives 1978.
- 11 *Hide/Seek* was curated by Jonathan Katz and David Ward; *Trigger* by Johanna Burton; *Kiss My Genders* by Vincent Honoré; and *Queer California: Untold Stories* by Christina Linden.
- 12 Under the banner of trans, I am including gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender expansive, and all people who are not cis. As problematic a conflation as it may be, I am using trans in this way as a shorthand to coalition build across constituencies, but the diversity of identifications under the trans umbrella calls for greater exposition elsewhere.
- 13 For more on the complexity of the assigning of identity and value based on surface appearance, see: Tagg (1993); Solomon-Godeau (2009); Weheliye (2014); Sturken and Cartwright (2018).
- 14 Jack Halberstam uses the term “body plasticity” in discussing Prosser’s argument in their powerful summation of trans theory, Halberstam (2018), see the chapter “Trans* Feminisms.”
- 15 The phrase “becoming a woman” refers to Simone de Beauvoir’s hugely influential feminist argument in de Beauvoir (1949/1952, 249).
- 16 For details on their accomplishments, see Alabanza’s website, available at: <http://travisalabanza.co.uk>, accessed on May 17, 2023.
- 17 As described on the opening page of Alabanza’s website, available at: <http://travisalabanza.co.uk>, accessed on October 10, 2022.
- 18 The power of Alabanza’s performance relates to Muñoz’s (1999, 1–34) argument about the power of one queer standing alone on stage.
- 19 This relates to the concept of the trans “freak,” which I discuss in Lehner (2019).
- 20 Butler’s work is both useful in terms of feminist, queer, and trans theory and has some critical limitations. For a nuanced discussion of the insights and pitfalls of Butler’s work, see Jones (2021, especially 204–206).
- 21 This failure can be aligned with an experience of freakishness or dysphoria on part of the trans person’s experience—and it may come in front of the mirror, or it may come in daily life. For more information on experiences and theorization around dysphoria as a pathologizing discourse, see Stryker and Aizura (2013).
- 22 Trans studies scholars including Susan Stryker, Jack Halberstam, micha cárdenas, and others have taken up the study of gender as a regulating apparatus as well.
- 23 For more on interconnection between racism and gender oppression, see Thomas (2007, 9–10, 23); Herzig (2016); Sears (2015); Ordover (2003).
- 24 The issue of bodily autonomy is one that, particularly in the current climate of US politics, with the 2022 Supreme Court overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (the 1973 ruling giving women the right to an abortion) is very much on the mind of many feminists, and queers as well.
- 25 For other critical takes on these norms, see the essays in Tourmaline, Stanley, and Burton (2017); Stryker (2008); Stryker and Aizura (2013).
- 26 I mention the United States and the United Kingdom specifically, as Alabanza is a London-based artist and the performance I write about took place in Boston, Massachusetts in the United States

- 27 On disidentification and trans theory, also see Bey (2022); Chen (2019); Ochoa (2014); Snorton (2017); Vaid-Menon (2020).

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PERFORMANCE THEORY

The “Studies Protocols” of Performance Studies

Joshua Chambers-Letson

I

The topical anthology essay typically serves to define and historicize a concept—in this case, the subfield of theoretical discourse concerned with performance and known as “performance theory.” The exercise is meant to offer the reader an overview of this concept’s development within a scholarly discipline (or set of interdisciplines)—here performance studies and art history. It raises questions relevant to the context in which it appears—an anthology on contemporary art in a global framework. The composition of such an essay is thus a process of capturing, containing, categorizing, synthesizing, and making available dispersed forms of knowledge. Correspondingly, as performance theorist Alexandra Vazquez teaches us, the “anthological impulse” has an active relationship to the colonial will to knowledge, where the scholar’s art of accessing, knowing, categorizing, and defining is used to make accessible, extractable, and instrumentalizable knowledge about the colonized and/or the racialized (Vazquez 2013, 57–67). This chapter aims to turn the anthological essay against this purpose.

Performance studies and performance theory (which are related, but not fully collapsible) can be understood as mutually embedded within, and inheritors to, a host of paradigmatically colonial, imperial, and white dominant epistemologies, discourses, and methods drawn from traditional disciplines (especially anthropology, philosophy, literature, theater, and art history). This chapter tells a story about the dominant stories that are told about the emergence of performance studies and performance theory. Rather than offer a definitive history or even counter-history of the field, this chapter tracks the way that disciplinary attempts to define “performance studies” and “performance theory” have reproduced and reified the colonial and racializing dimensions of both, while disappearing and forgetting these dynamics into the field’s more universal claims *about* performance.

Since the consolidation of the field of performance studies as an academic discipline in the late twentieth century, there has been a broad spectrum of anthologies and foundational texts seeking to define and describe performance studies or performance theory. A central contradiction in this body of work coheres around a tenuous agreement that performance confounds, if it does not elude, definitional capture. In their introduction to the 2006 *Sage*

Handbook of Performance Studies, for example, D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera draw on the language of philosopher Walter Bryce Gallie to describe performance as an “essentially contested concept”: “Performance is a contested concept because when we understand performance beyond theatrics and recognize it as fundamental and inherent to life and culture we are confronted with the ambiguities of different spaces and places that are foreign, contentious, and often under siege” (Madison and Hamera 2006, xii). Richard Schechner, who has undertaken an expansive project of describing, defining, and anthologizing (his version of) performance and performance studies, takes a similar position. In the 2002 textbook, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, he writes that “Performance studies resists fixed definition” (Schechner 2002, 19). This marked an extension of his description of performance in 1985s *Between Theatre and Anthropology*: “performance activities are fundamentally processual: there will always be a certain proportion of them in the process of transformation, categorically undefinable” (Schechner 1985, 118; also see Reinelt and Roach 1992, 3).

In the introduction to a co-edited (with Jill Lane) 1998 anthology, *The Ends of Performance*, Peggy Phelan takes a similar position. Where Phelan famously drew a line delimiting and defining “the ontology of performance” in a foundational 1993 essay, she notes in her editorial introduction to the 1998 volume that:

[p]art of what performance knows is the impossibility of maintaining the distinction between temporal tenses, between an absolutely singular beginning and ending, between living and dying. What performance studies learns most deeply from performance is the generative force of those “betweens” (Phelan 1998, 8).

In light of performance’s contested, ambiguous, processual, undefinable, and liminal nature, however, the disciplinary history of the field is an expansive exercise in attempted capture, definition, and delimitation.

Performance studies emerged amidst the proliferation of interdisciplinary academic projects aimed at deconstructing and challenging traditional disciplines and their material and ideological relationship to the dominant blocs of power. But as Vazquez argues, the potentially disruptive and creative energies of these projects run the risk of being contained when they are subject to what Hortense Spillers describes as a “studies protocol” (Vazquez 2013, 56). Where interdisciplinary projects like performance studies (or, Black studies, for Spillers) attend to, in Vazquez’s words, “subjects and objects that have not been accorded prominent status in the [traditional] disciplines” (Vazquez 2013, 56) their accumulation within the logics of academic disciplinarization (historicization, narration, and canonization into a “studies” rubric) aids in making accessible and graspable that which is otherwise “between,” marginalized within, and liminal to traditional knowledge formations.

By the time a studies protocol “reaches us,” Spillers writes, “it has already acquired the sanction of repetition, the authority of repression, and the blessing of time and mimesis so that, effectually, such a protocol now belongs to the smooth natural order of the cultural” (Spillers 2003, 3). This repertoire of repetition, repression, duration, and mimesis (in anthologies, textbooks, and class lectures, for example) is what allows the protocol to forget, or displace, its “provenance or its whereabouts,” including the ideological underpinnings that facilitated its instantiation. Vazquez thus understands the “studies protocol” to be “the authoritative formulae that seek to make legible and transparent those materials that cannot be made legible and transparent” (Vazquez 2013, 56). In the case of the studies protocol that forms around performance studies, we will see how the process has participated in the (re)production of social and cultural hierarchy and the accumulation and (re)production of racial and colonial epistemologies, followed by a twice-behaved forgetting or displacing of these dynamics.

In both the European and US academy, scholarly knowledge production has variously functioned as an engine of “primitive accumulation” in the service of imperialism, colonialism, racial capitalism, and white patriarchal rule.¹ To aid in the conquest of land and

racialized labor, the systems of empire, capitalism, and white supremacy all necessitated the collection, categorization, and creation of knowledge about the racialized and colonized. Traditional scholarly disciplines (especially anthropology) lent their talents to this project, just as literature, history, philosophy, and art history—arguably central fields in the family tree of performance studies—were variously deployed to define and confirm the racial and colonial cleavages, logics, and ideologies that justified and maintained systems of colonial dominion and white rule. Thus, and as Serita Echavez See argues, one can, “understand the imperial archive as a mode of accumulating a special kind of capital—knowledge—and I contend that this accumulation of knowledge depends on the idea of the racial primitive” (see Echavez 2017, 2).

The studies protocols narrating performance studies have consistently marshaled its radical interdisciplinarity to position itself as disrupting and placing pressure on the traditional disciplines. In principle, this claim to iconoclasm places performance studies in critical opposition to the imperial archive and the master discourses of the traditional disciplines, if not simply the master’s discourse. But the studies protocol also runs the risk of obscuring the colonial and racial dynamics of the field—and its reliance upon the idea of the racial primitive—both as they are spontaneously generated within performance studies and inherited from the master discourses in its family tree. This is a particularly weighty risk given the way performance studies’ stated investments in the cultural, racial, and colonial “Other” have shaped and defined its fluid spectrum of interest (see Schechner 2002, 2).

The studies protocol’s impulse to define and delimit performance has led Tavia Nyong’o to ask whether some of the field’s “formal anxiety over disciplinary ‘mission creep’ needs to be thought of in dialectical relation to its underside, the political anxiety over the bordering work needed to keep racial, gendered, and classed others (for example) at the margins of concern ... Might the messiness of definitions be preferable to the security of borders?” (Nyong’o 2009, 174). As Nyong’o notes, by fixing the definition of performance, or fixing performance studies and performance theory within a studies protocol, we may close the borders of the field to the very forms of racialized and colonized being that (as I will argue here) paradoxically function as the field’s fertile analytical ground.

It is a commonly rehearsed adage in the performance studies classroom that, given the slipperiness of performance, the performance studies scholar may be better oriented to describing what performance *does* (its performativity) rather than attempting to define what performance *is* (its ontology). By extension, following a deconstruction of the studies protocol’s command to define and delimit what performance studies or performance theory are (their ontologies), I will conclude this chapter by suggesting that we gain much when we linger instead on the question of what we can *do* with performance theory—a question whose answer reverberates through the expanding libraries of minoritarian performance theory.

II

In this section, I revisit the most rehearsed narrative of performance studies’ and performance theory’s disciplinary origins at New York University and Northwestern University: a story that appears in textbooks and anthologies as well as student’s examinations, term papers, and dissertations. I recount this story not because it is *my* preferred family tree for performance studies. It is not, even though I am implicated within it, receiving my PhD from NYU in 2009 and joining Northwestern’s faculty in 2011. My turn to this narrative is because it is representative, par excellence, of the studies protocol’s attempts to define and delimit the field.

By returning to and deconstructing this origin story, I risk the reification of its status as *the* story of performance studies and performance theory, even though my broader point is that we don’t need to fix and delimit *the* definitive story of performance studies or performance

theory to put them to work. By putting pressure on some of the scholarship that has been foundational to the field, I also run the risk of obscuring the fact that these are works and ideas that have been critical to my own intellectual project. To be clear, much of the work discussed critically here remains valuable and much beloved to me and the pressure I bring to bear upon it is not meant to displace its continued utility and importance. Nonetheless, I accept these risks to show how the studies protocol shaping this official narrative of performance studies and performance theory elide and occlude some of the tumultuous racial and colonial dynamics at play within a field that has never quite reckoned with its own complicity in the dynamics of imperialism, colonialism, and the centering of whiteness. This latter claim may surprise at least a few readers situated outside of performance studies given that some of the most recognizable and influential work in performance studies centers the study of race, sexuality, gender, class, and other forms of minoritarian being. This reader will likely also be surprised to discover that in the imperial archives and studies protocols defining performance studies (its many anthologies, in particular), “performance theory” has been repeatedly represented as a mostly white affair, with people of color either fixed as an object of study or nearly excluded from the framework altogether.

In *The Ends of Performance*, Phelan rehearses a narrative of the field’s establishment as a product of what Luce Irigaray might describe as ho(m)mo-sexual reproduction between a theater artist and an anthropologist amidst the founding of the first department of performance studies at New York University in 1980:

One potent version of the history of performance studies is that the field was born out of the fecund collaborations between Richard Schechner and Victor Turner ... bringing theatre and anthropology together ... [and asking] could performance be a universal expression of human signification, akin to language” (Phelan 1998, 3).²

This is a story that is oft-repeated—by Schechner most of all—and it is worth noting that the universality of performance is established vis-à-vis a queer birth narrative involving some resolutely heterosexual academia bros. The Schechner–Turner origin story is further complicated by its own, gendered occlusions, including that of the critical role that the department’s first chair, folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, played in shaping the nascent discipline (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998).³

The other main narrative of performance studies’ emergence has similar plotlines. Northwestern University’s Department of Interpretation changed its name to the Department of Performance Studies in 1984. In his 2002 textbook, Schechner offers a friendly version of this “other history” of the field: “Northwestern’s brand of performance studies ... emerged from speech communications, oral interpretation (the performance of literature other than dramas), rhetoric (debate and public speaking), and urban anthropology” (Schechner 2002, 17). Shannon Jackson has wryly noted that this narrative also relies upon another mythography of ho(m)mo-sexual reproduction and a fusion of theater and anthropology, albeit with a different cast of characters:

The development of Northwestern’s Department of Performance Studies proceeds from a different direction ... There are occasional stories of men giving birth—though Wallace Bacon and Robert Breen are a generation older than Schechner—and of performers meeting anthropologists—though the figures might be Dwight Conquergood and Mary Douglas (Jackson 2010, 9).

While sharing the anthropological tendencies of the NYU tradition, Northwestern’s differential emphasis on literature, elocution, theatrical adaptation, and oral tradition relied upon and reified the reproduction of the cannon of Western civilization—and its presumed greatness—as inherited from literary studies and, by extension, theater studies or drama.

The foundational texts of the Northwestern tradition (those by Bacon, especially) were not deconstructing or dismantling the canons of Western civilization so much as they expanded them and put pressure on the textual emphasis in scholarly approaches to literature. They centered performance as a useful means of encountering and inhabiting the “Otherness of the Other” coherent within a given text (Bacon 1979, 40).

Within both traditions, performance studies scholarship obsessively and often fetishistically centered the cultural practices of the racialized and colonized as objects of study, framing racial and colonial difference as the epistemological grounds from which universal theories of performance could be extracted and articulated. Schechner’s seminal *Between Theater and Anthropology*, for example, tellingly featured a photograph of an unidentified Indigenous dancer, credited as “a Yaqui deer dancer,” on its cover. In the opening pages of the book, Schechner’s encounter with the unnamed dancer’s performance practice becomes the primal scene for the birth of his famous theory of performance as a “betwixt” and “between” phenomenon from the realm of the “not-not” (Schechner 1985, 4).⁴ The passage also sets up Schechner’s definition of performance theory as pursuing two tracks: (1) looking at human behavior as performance and (2) studying aesthetic performances and their social effects (Schechner 1985, 296).

The example of the Yaqui dancer in Schechner’s text reflects the measures through which, following Jodi Byrd, indigeneity is instrumentalized as a “transit of empire” since “ideas of Indians and Indianness have served as the ontological ground through which US settler colonialism enacts itself as settler imperialism” (Byrd 2011, xix). Attending to the detail of the Yaqui dancer necessitates a reckoning with performance studies’ complicity in the process described by Byrd. The dancer is a prototypical transit: Schechner passes through his performance to develop a universal set of theories about performance and performance theory, while offering no comment on (or forgetting) the ongoing dynamics of settler colonialism in New Pascua, Arizona, where the performance occurs and from which Schechner is an immediate beneficiary. Any Indigenous epistemologies the dancer may bring to the performance are obscured in Schechner’s account and the dance, largely stripped of its context, is translated into Schechner’s universal theories of performance. In keeping with the transit’s function, the dancer is gone (but not forgotten) by page thirteen, giving way to the remaining chapter’s pronouncement of universal theories of performance as the “restoration of behavior” via rituals that “transport and transform” the participants.

Schechner illustrates the book’s arguments with a global and cross-cultural blend of examples that include Plymouth Plantation, a Manhattan BDSM performance, Jean Genet’s work, contemporary theater, and an overwhelming number of examples drawn from national and cultural sites marked by colonialism, including Arizona, New Guinea, and (most of all) India. Emphasizing this mix of global sites of analysis, Schechner attempts a sidestep of critiques of his project’s colonial and imperial tendencies, let alone its whiteness, by framing the endeavor as “intercultural” exchange. In the 2002 primer on *Performance Studies*, Schechner defines the “intercultural” as that which is “between or among two or more cultures. Intercultural performances may emphasize the integrative or disjunctive” (Schechner 2002, 226). This definition largely eschews the lack of equilibrium in the racial and cultural power dynamics at play in these exchanges, which Schechner acknowledges but does not ultimately contend with.

In an important intervention into the discourse of interculturalism from 1994, Coco Fusco insisted that we might track the origins of modern performance and performance art through the violent histories of the “‘ethnological’ displays of non-whites,” which offered the white artistic (and scholarly) avant-garde an imaginative playground on which they could develop their practices while reifying the colonial and racial hierarchies that underscored them (Fusco 1994, 148).⁵ Fusco submits that this process comes with significant risks for the racial and colonial subject on display, since “what may be ‘liberating’ and ‘transgressive’ identification for Europeans and Euro-Americans is already a symbol of

entrapment within an imposed stereotype for Others” (Fusco 1994, 151). The intercultural, in this sense, was not only a mode of colonial appropriation by another name but it could also function as a method for fixing the racialized and colonized within the fantasies of the white avant-garde. Interculturalism offered the “radical” iconoclasm of performance studies a means to articulate the transgressive, liberating, universal theory of “performance” without displacing the colonial and racial orders facilitating the speech-act. In turn, the problematic matters of race and empire could be sublimated into the universalization of performance as the intercultural betwixt and between of liveness, presence, and exchange.

In a different way, this tendency is also reflected in emerging definitions of performance and performance theory that drew on traditions of philosophical and theoretical abstraction. In 1993, for example, Phelan issued a polarizing, universal theory of performance that drew on psychoanalysis, feminist theory, and critical theory more than theater or anthropology. Phelan described performance’s ontology as the domain of liveness: “Performance’s only life is in the present ... Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance” (Phelan 1996, 146). Doing so, she explores performance’s capacity to withdraw from presence and its putative refusal to “enter the economy of reproduction” (Phelan 1996, 146). Performance offered the subject a passageway to becoming “unmarked” against the subjectifying “trap” of visibility, leading Phelan to conclude that, “[t]here is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal” (Phelan 1996, 6).

Phelan’s suspicion of visibility and representation (or what Michel Foucault described as the “trap” of visibility) is remarkably generative (see Foucault 1975/1995, 195–228). As I place pressure upon her theorization of the “power in remaining unmarked,” I want to underscore the degree to which this chapter continues to be (rightfully) one of the most influential and debated within the field, just as it has had an outsized impact on my own intellectual development. Grounded in an explicitly feminist analytic, Phelan was responding to and pushing back against the circumscription and marking of femmes and their bodies into the service of ho(m)mo-sexual reproduction. As she argued: “Since the female body and the female character cannot be ‘staged’ or ‘seen’ within representational mediums without challenging the hegemony of male desire, it can be effective politically and aesthetically to deny representing the female body (imagistically, physically)” (Phelan 1996, 164). However, by lacking a substantive analytic regarding race, this analysis seemed to presume a white femme subject, before reifying whiteness’ dominant presumption of, and claim to, being unmarked as one of its inherent powers. As Meiling Cheng noted in a response to Phelan from 2002, it is “hard to distinguish the subliminal policy of invisibility administered by the dominant culture to absent its ‘abnormal’ members from the invisibility politics adopted by the ‘abnormal’ members to induce the implosion of the dominant culture. It is unfortunate but likely that the ideology of the invisible will result in the erasure of ‘abnormality’ from the privileged norm” (Cheng 2002, 246). People of color might not be able to claim the powers of remaining unmarked (which are structurally reserved for whiteness), just as the discourse of the unmarked might further the elision of those perpetually marked by the (ab)normalizing forces of racialization.

Diana Taylor’s influential *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003)—in part an engaged response to Phelan—begins and ends with brief references to Taylor’s whiteness in a narrative that powerfully reflects the complex power dynamics that cohere in performance scenarios where whiteness remains unmarked. This story also suggests the dangers that cohere for people of color for whom the art of being unmarked may be a structural impossibility from within the orders of a white dominant society. The book opens with a story of Taylor’s childhood in a “small mining town in the north of Mexico” with two parents who relocated to Mexico from Canada (Taylor 2003, xiii). The story is thoughtfully narrated to give a nuanced example of the way embodied, cultural experiences undermine strict categories of racial, national, or cultural distinction. To do this, Taylor discloses race in an

elliptical manner: “I knew I wasn’t Canadian, but I no longer felt completely Mexican ... In a world set up in terms of ‘First World’ and ‘Third world,’ ‘white’ and ‘brown,’ ‘us’ and ‘them,’ I wasn’t them, but I wasn’t us either” (Taylor 2003, xv). The repertoire of cultural transmission—in which knowledge and cultural memory is transferred across space and time by embodied practices—provides Taylor with a nuanced vocabulary for describing her complicated existence “between” “white” and “brown,” or “Canadian” and “Mexican.” It also largely renders Taylor’s racialization as a white person obscure for most of the book. However, in the final chapter she has a tense encounter with the NYPD and the powers of remaining unmarked come surging to the fore.

She is watching a group of Afro-Caribbean musicians perform in Central Park when the police roll up to harass the performers and shut down the performance. “The police were also performing,” she writes, continuing: “‘We’re all professionals here,’ one officer said, acting for my camera. Would he have been so polite if I weren’t white?” (Taylor 2003, 268). Taylor knows the answer already because she has been watching the cops harass the musicians. If Taylor were Black, the exchange might not just have been not polite; it could have been deadly. For most of the book, Taylor’s whiteness has been rendered obscure. When it surfaces at the book’s end in this brief encounter with a polite police officer, it becomes clear what the “real power” of “remaining unmarked” (per Phelan) may be for the white performance theorist: the ability to enter a scene in which the state asserts the power of racial dominance, without being threatened by this assertion. Taylor’s account simultaneously documents the forms of risk and precarity that performance may expose to the racialized performer, as she allows us to see how the fantasy of remaining “unmarked” remains a virtual impossibility for the racialized and colonized performer (or, by extension, the performance theorist of color).

Fusco’s critique of interculturalism’s roots in live ethnographic display, or Saidiya Hartman’s analysis in *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) of the central role performance cultures played in (re)producing and maintaining the brutal orders of white domination in the United States (both during and after slavery), places pressure on celebratory approaches to liveness and performance. Where liveness and performance offer a transgressive way to resist dominant hierarchy and hegemony for the white avant-garde artist or performance theorist, the scholar and artist of color must still grapple with the conditions outlined by Fusco and Hartman, or otherwise described by José Esteban Muñoz in another partial response to Phelan in *Disidentifications* (1999) as “the burden of liveness”: “the burden to always already be live that the minoritarian subject must continually negotiate” (Muñoz 1999, 188–189). For the racialized and colonized, performance is not always a choice and rarely a process in which the body surfaces as in any way unmarked. Following Hartman, the marks may even be registered as tears and scars in black(ened) and brown(ed) skin, or what Spillers would describe as the “hieroglyphics of the flesh” (Spillers 2003, 207).

Elaborating on the hieroglyphics of the flesh in 1987, Spillers wrote, “[w]e might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding [the skin of the enslaved] actually ‘transfers’ from one generation to another, finding its various *symbolic substitutions* in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments” (Spillers 2003, 207). This conception of cultural substitution and the “transfer” of memory, subjection, and racial meaning predict foundational theories of performance, especially Taylor’s 2003 description of “acts of transfer” and Joseph Roach’s theory of surrogation in *Cities of the Dead* (1996): “memory, performance, and substitution ... [cohere as] culture reproduces and re-creates itself by a process that can be best described by the word *surrogation*” (Roach 1996, 2; Taylor 2003). Spillers theory of the embodied transmission of culture, alongside Taylor’s and Roach’s, also resonates with the deconstruction of textualism in another major work by Dwight Conquergood.

In a seminal 2002 manifesto on performance studies methodologies in the Northwestern tradition, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” Conquergood rehearses the field’s critical investment in breaking away from text as a repudiation of the

colonial and imperial dimensions of knowledge production. To do so, his critique risked the unintentional and undesired reification of a racialized binary, dividing text and archive (the province of white/Euro-US/imperial/colonial power) from the domain of liveness, embodiment, performance, and the repertoire (associated with the Indigenous, racialized, colonized, and otherwise subordinated cultures). Conquergood follows Michel de Certeau to conclude that textualism and “scriptocentrism is a hallmark of Western imperialism” (Conquergood 2002/2013, 34). He rightly argues that oppressed and subordinated people—commonly facing violently policed interdictions to literacy and intellection—often communicate and transmit knowledge through embodied practices to contend that:

[t]he state of emergency under which many people live demands that we pay attention to the messages that are coded and encrypted; to indirect, nonverbal, and extralinguistic modes of communication where subversive meanings and utopians yearnings can be sheltered and shielded from surveillance (Conquergood 2002/2013, 36).

A question lingers, however, regarding the ethical implications of paying attention to, and translating into scholarly discourse, the (often embodied) “modes of communication” that were designed precisely to be “sheltered and shielded from surveillance.”

In the 1996 essay “Ephemera as Evidence,” Muñoz argued that queer folks and people of color have often had to veil the meanings and articulations of their performances to hide them from the surveilling, disciplinary, and expropriative forces of the dominant culture. Along these lines, the method proposed by Conquergood ran the risk of participating in the colonial project of primitive accumulation by listening to the performances of the subordinated only to (returning to Vazquez’s phrasing) “make legible and transparent those materials that cannot [or should not] be made legible and transparent” (Vazquez 2013, 56).

Conquergood directly grappled with the ethical implications of his scholarly practice, finding solutions in the realm of method. The emphasis on method in performance ethnography (as exemplified in the work of Conquergood, Madison, Hamera, Della Pollock, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, and E. Patrick Johnson or, more recently, Ramón Rivera-Servera, Marlon Bailey, Roshanak Kheshti, Jasmine Mahmoud, Jeffrey McCune, Kareem Khubchandani, Victoria Fortuna, Lore/ta LeMaster, or Kemi Adeyemi) aimed itself at the ethical implications of performance studies scholarship through a mindful practice of ethnographic situatedness. As Madison argues, “This means that the ethnographer must self-consciously represent herself by presenting some semblance of her own dispositions and methods of representation. The aim is not for the researcher to disappear from the performance or the report, but to be accountable and responsible for her own choices” (Madison 2010, 13). It is true that anthropology’s proper subject—the imperious knowing one—isn’t quite abolished here. In fact, the subject of Western epistemology is inadvertently re-affirmed through the ethnographer’s protocols of self-conscious self-reference and self-representation. But Madison’s and Conquergood’s deployments of, and interventions in, method facilitated a means for negotiating that limit with intention, while emphatically resisting the lures of a “politics of performance” that disappears into a dangerous claim to being “unmarked.”

In narratives of performance studies’ origins at Northwestern and NYU—stories that I can attest are often told within those departments—Northwestern is described as a center of performance ethnography and conceived of at the axis of adaptation and oral interpretation, whereas NYU is framed as the seat of performance theory, born from the nexus of theater, anthropology, and critical theory. One of the unfortunate outcomes of this line of dual narration can be an entirely false presumption of a distinction between performance theory and performance ethnography, even though they are not mutually exclusive formations. Attendant to this problem is an obscuration of the way both traditions have pursued similar theoretical trajectories.

Take the example of the resonance in the arguments between Conquergood’s manifesto for performance studies and Taylor’s theorization of “the archive” and “the repertoire,” each

published within a year of each other (Taylor 2003). In both approaches, the privileging of text is critiqued for its relationship to Western imperialisms, just as both risk the reification of a series of binaries that place textualism, the archive, the colonizer's epistemologies, and writing on the one side and embodiment, the repertoire, liveness, and the performance practices of the racialized and colonized largely clustered on the other. The binary is concededly unstable, as when Conquergood illustrates the work of minoritarian performance by analyzing the writings of Frederick Douglass and Zora Neale Hurston, carefully noting that "in Hurston's account, subordinate people read and write, as well as perform" (Conquergood 2002/2013, 40). But the framework still risks saddling people of color with the burden of liveness, while providing white scholars an exit route into the dimly lit corridors of the archive where they might be able to escape, unmarked. Taylor and Conquergood are both conscious of these risks and negotiate with them throughout their work.

More brazen, however, has been the way the anthologizing project of the field's studies protocol curated and narrated performance studies, and performance theory, as the province of an unmarked whiteness. As the field of performance studies consolidated into an academic discipline in the US academy between the early 1980s and early 2000s, a host of anthologies sought to establish an interchangeability between whiteness and performance theory, while leaving these dynamics quietly unremarked upon and, thus, unmarked. Many of these anthologies share a set of features: (1) they all feature overwhelmingly white contributor lists underscored by the minimal inclusion of one to a few scholars of color; and (2) their introductions narrate the history of performance studies and performance theory by giving weight, nuance, and deference to the intellectual histories of white and Euro-US theorists and philosophers without providing the same (or any) consideration to minoritarian intellectuals or scholarship from outside the Euro-US, or their distinct (and shared) intellectual histories.

In 1992 Janelle Reinelt and Roach published *Critical Theory and Performance* to address the prominence of theory in performance based, humanistic inquiry. In the "General Introduction" to the volume, they refer to at least twenty-five "theorists" who form the intellectual foundation for the anthology, drawing names from philosophy, anthropology, literature, theater studies, and art history (Reinelt and Roach 1992). Everyone named is a man, almost all of them straight and white, and more than a few of them outright purveyors of white supremacist and colonial ideologies.⁶ A similar tendency appears in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's editorial introduction to the 1995 *Performativity and Performance*, as well as Phelan's editorial introduction to *The Ends of Performance*, or Tracy C. Davis's editorial introduction to the 2008 volume *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*.⁷ A turn to the contributors lists for all four of these volumes (as well as the 2007 "revised and enlarged" edition of Reinelt and Roach's anthology) reveal a similar editorial tendency.

Between 1992, when the first edition of *Critical Theory and Performance* was published, and the 2008 publication of *The Cambridge Companion*, this group of anthologizing projects overwhelmingly featured white contributors.⁸ In so doing they present a profoundly misleading view of the field, especially as many of the most dynamic and influential (outside of performance studies) works of performance theory from the mid-1990s on—such as Fusco's work, Hartman's (1997) *Scenes of Subjection*, Dorinne Kondo's (1997) *About Face*, Philip J. Deloria's (1998) *Playing Indian*, Muñoz's (1999) *Disidentifications*, Karen Shimakawa's (2002) *National Abjection*, Fred Moten's (2003) *In the Break*, E. Patrick Johnson's (2003) *Appropriating Blackness*, or Daphne A. Brooks's (2006) *Bodies in Dissent, 1850–1910*—were generated by scholars of color attending to questions of race and coloniality.⁹ It's notable that Madison and Hamera's 2006 anthology engages with and includes a more diverse set of contributors and references, highlighting Muñoz's then-developing work on queer utopia and Johnson's important, alternative genealogy of the field in the essay "Black Performance Studies." This exception proved the rule, however, drawing into the relief the fact that the whiteness of the other volumes (notwithstanding excellent contributions by the few scholars

of color included) were shaped by editorial *decision*—a “twice-behaved behavior,” even, that was made repeatedly and unnecessarily until it became part of the “smooth natural order of the cultural” established by and within the studies protocol.

Responding to these dynamics in his landmark *In the Break*, Moten critiques Euro-US centric theories and histories of the artistic avant-garde (such as Sally Banes’ *Greenwich Village 1963*) for comprising:

a vast interdisciplinary text representative not only of a problematically positivist conclusion that the avant-garde has been exclusively Euro-American, but of a deeper, perhaps unconscious, formulation of the avant-garde as necessarily not black. Part of what I’m after now is this: an assertion that the avant-garde is a black thing (that, for the sake of argument, Richard Schechner wouldn’t understand) and an assertion that blackness is an avant-garde thing (that, for the sake of argument, Albert Murray wouldn’t understand) (Moten 2003, 32–33).

The studies protocols I have been describing, achieve a similar effect, extrapolating, and extracting universal theories of performance from racialized and colonial sites, while defining performance theory as the province of the (mostly) white scholar. What I’m after now, however, is an assertion that performance theory *is* a Black, Brown, Asian, Indigenous, queer, femme, and trans of color thing (that, for the sake of argument, some of the scholars thus far discussed wouldn’t understand) and an assertion that performance studies can continue to be fertile ground for the development of minoritarian epistemologies and practices.

III

This is to return us to a series of mutually informed questions: shifting from the studies protocol’s compulsion to delimit and define what performance theory *is*, to the question of what can be *done* with performance theory? How, we might also ask, has minoritarian scholarship claimed such a prominent place within performance studies, given the field’s self-narrated foundation on (and constant elision and disappearance) of the fraught racial and colonial dynamics thus far discussed? These questions, in turn, have implications for the question of performance theory’s relationship to art history within a global context.

In an essay included in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, Amelia Jones described a “double failure of art history to attend to body and performance art and of performance studies to address art historical accounts of body and performance” (Jones 2008). That essay placed insightful critical pressure on art history’s own studies protocols, mapping the discipline’s then “refus[al] to acknowledge the crucial role of the body in the production and reception of works of art” (Jones 2008, 151). Building on her seminal monograph *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (1998), in which she undertook a rigorous feminist destabilization of the (Cartesian) subject in body art and performance, Jones argued that art history’s denial of the body was rooted in enlightenment (Kantian) epistemology’s division between the rationalist operations of the “mind” and the messy, fleshy subjectivity of “the body” (see Jones 1998). The disciplinary protocols established within art history sought to extinguish the subjective experience of the body to provide a “disinterested” (and, by extension, unmarked) critical relationship to the art object (Jones 2008, 152).¹⁰ Art that relied upon the body was charged with an insurgent capacity to disrupt these dynamics, and Jones argued for (and exemplifies) a radical mode of art historical scholarship that centers the body (as both an object of study and as the locus through which art is experienced).

The rogue art historian’s centering of the body might disrupt some of the studies protocols determining art history, while theoretically placing pressure on the field’s sanctioned role as the canon-forging and mythographer of Western civilization’s aesthetic greatness. But

it might also be constrained by those very dynamics. Jones's *Body/Art* put pressure on art history's centering of male artists within the cannon, whereas the narratives of body art, live art, and performance put forth in art historical texts such as, for example, RoseLee Goldberg's (1979/2011) influential book *Performance Art* make heavy recourse to art history's sanctioned cannon of mostly white, mostly male, Euro-American, twentieth-century avant-garde artists and movements with a few, muted genuflections to artists of color (mostly Japanese, such as the Gutai Group and, passingly, Yoko Ono).¹¹ The capacity to attend to the full range of disruptive critical effects of embodiment were, in this sense, hampered by traditional art history's Euro-centric focus and its stubbornly underdeveloped analytic capacities regarding race and empire.

Jones writes of the degree to which the disciplinary protocols of art history have historically defined the proper objects and methods of the field in a fashion that not only excluded consideration of work involving the body, but also historically excluded consideration of most of the cultural labors of non-white artists both within and outside of North American and European boundaries. African, Asian, Latinx, and Indigenous cultural practices could be considered within the field, to be sure, but largely insofar as they were consigned to pre-modern antiquity or reflected a contemporary artist's capacity to preserve/reflect "authentic" (non-Western) traditions *as defined by* the (Western) art historian. Alternatively, with the advent of neoliberal multiculturalism in the 1990s, the work of non-white, non-European/North American artists might be incorporated into the art historical project through well-intended, but compromised, rubrics of inclusion and recovery. At their best, these approaches offered much insight but often left the core principles of the art historical studies protocol unchallenged. At their worst, they reified its dominant racial epistemologies by (for example) segregating considerations of the contributions of non-white artists and theorists into the dreaded "race chapter," or slightly more porous chapters or subsections organized under headings like "identity/identities," "world citizenship," or "politics and performance" (on these latter, more porous categories, see Goldberg 1979/2011, 210–215, 2018, 70–155; Warr 2000, 134–161).

The 1990s and first decade of the new millennium saw the development and emergence of an accomplished body of work by curators and art historians of color (including Joan Kee, Kellie Jones, C. Ondine Chavoya, Midori Yoshimoto, Susette Min, Cherise Smith, Ming Tiampo, Valerie Cassel Oliver, and Reiko Tomii) who built upon the work of previous generations of art scholars and critics of color to push back against this tradition as they engaged questions of performance and embodiment alongside considerations of race, nation, and empire. In so doing they opened new approaches for conceiving of the relationship between performance, race, and, importantly, "the body." Discussing Black artists working with embodiment and performance in 1970s Los Angeles, for example, Kellie Jones argues that "performance in this period was enacted by a skeptical body" that was attuned to the often-violent uses of bodies in the processes of racialization (Jones 2017, 223). She tracks artists including David Hammonds and Senga Nengudi as they engage embodiment in their practices, to criticize and (in Nengudi's case, especially) enact alternatives to the subjectifying, racializing valences of a body. The "skeptical body" of the artist or scholar of color engaging performance might, in turn, develop a skepticism toward the subjectifying discourses of "the body" altogether.

Emphasizing art history's relationship to visual culture and performance studies' relation to theater and anthropology, Amelia Jones concludes that that the cleavage between the two fields "has perhaps less to do with the body and more to do with the schism between art history and performance studies as they are situated in the university" (Jones 2008, 161).¹² I might respectfully suggest that the answer is both. From the vantage point of the time of writing (2022), many of the most prominent performance theorists engaging the nexus of performance studies and the study of body art, performance art, and visual culture (including, but by no means limited to, Muñoz, Moten, Nyong'o, Rodríguez, See,

Amber Musser, Uri McMillan, Sandra Ruiz, Malik Gaines, Ricardo Montez, Hentyle Yapp, Vivian Huang, Marcela Fuentes, C. Riley Snorton, Joshua Javier Guzmán, Patricia Nguyen, Bimbola Akinbola, Lilian Mengesha, Lakshmi Padmanabahn, micha cárdenas, Christina Léon, Kelly Chung, Madison Moore, Christine Mok, Fiona Ngô, Faye Gleisser, and Ivan Ramos) also center questions of race, nation, and coloniality in their work. In my experience of their work, the overwhelming body of this cohort engages scholarship in art history and visual culture to varying degrees. But one wouldn't blame those who have an aversion to art historical scholarship given art history's stubborn exclusion of the consideration of race. I wonder, too, if an aversion to art historical approaches that center the body might stem from a skepticism toward the very concept of "the body" given this concept's role in the (re)production of racial and colonial hierarchy.

As Spillers has argued, instead of conceiving of "the body" as a singular, fixed, material thing, it might better be understood as performative and discursive effect that is implicated within the processes of racialization and the mechanics of white rule and colonial domination:

the 'body' is neither *given* as an uncomplicated empirical rupture on the landscape of the human, nor do we ever actually 'see' it. In a very real sense, the 'body,' insofar as it is an analytical construct, does not exist at all ... [and] should be specified as a discursive and particular instance that belongs, always, to a *context*, and we must look for its import there (Spillers 2003, 21).

At issue, then, is not merely the rectification of the injustice forged by the exclusion of racial or cultural difference, nor is it the project of inclusion and recovery. Following Denise Ferreira Da Silva, what is required is a broader critique of universality and historicity, as such, and an effort to dismantle the "transparent subject" on which the orders of racialization, white rule, and colonialism rest (Da Silva, 2007).¹³ This movement would also require, as suggested by scholars in Black studies and postcolonial theory (including Spillers, Byrd, Da Silva, Sylvia Wynter, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Lisa Lowe, C. Riley Snorton, Alexander Weheliye, Katherine McKittrick, and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson) the denaturalization and deconstruction of concepts that include "the body" and "the human" amidst the ongoing dismantling of the racializing hierarchies within these orders (see Byrd 2011; Da Silva 2007; Jackson 2010; Lowe 2015; McKittrick 2006; Snorton 2017; Spillers 2003; Spivak 1999; Weheliye 2014; Wynter 1994). The question I am positing here is if, in spite of its colonial and racializing tendencies, performance theory might be mobilized toward this end?

The answer is available within the voluminous library of minoritarian performance theory: a rich body of work (only some of which has been gestured toward in footnotes 8 and 9) that center the study of queerness, racial performativity, and decolonial practices. This body of work engages, deconstructs, and deploys performance theory to, drawing language from Muñoz, "unsettle the hegemonic order through [a] performance of practice (a performance that imagines itself as praxis) ... [that is] rooted within a deep critique of universalism and the dominant power bloc" (Muñoz 2002, 111). While I have referenced and engaged some of this work in this chapter, I have not provided an expansive review of or discussion of the minoritarian wing of performance studies, nor offered an alternatively genealogy for this tradition—obscuring my own position within and contributions to the field, in the process. Admittedly, I worry that one of the effects of my critical focus on the studies protocols that dominate narratives of performance studies and performance theory is that I have obscured this critically important strand of the field.

The tradition of minoritarian performance theory does not have to situate its various arguments within genealogies that reference the field's appointed "fathers" (such as Schechner, Turner, Bacon, and Conquergood or Marx, Foucault, Freud, and Kant), though it could if it so chooses. But we might also catch its participants loosely affiliating beneath a mercurial,

non-linear, queer family tree with ever-shifting branches bearing names like Muñoz, Madison, Moten, and Vazquez, or Fusco, Ono, Moraga, and Simone; Spillers, Spivak, Lowe, and Da Silva, or Du Bois, Douglas, Hurston, and Fanon. This wayward, at-times necessarily fabulated genealogy would require an expansive conception of “theory,” rooted in and engaged with the frameworks of queer of color critique, Black feminisms (reflected in the work of Spillers, Wynter, Barbara Christian, or bell hooks), the “theories of the flesh” described in the woman of color feminisms of Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, or the theoretically generative performance practices of minoritarian subcultural workers (such as Vaginal Creme Davis, Ada Overton Walker, Nao Bustamante, Nengudi, or Ono, etc.) (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015, 19). Such alternative genealogies provide the means for minoritarian performance theory to, paraphrasing Thomas F. DeFrantz’s and Anita Gonzalez’s editorial introduction to the landmark 2014 anthology *Black Performance Theory*, “theorize black performance [and other forms of minoritarian performance] in terms of [their] ... own ontologies” (DeFrantz and Gonzalez 2014, 4) If I have avoided the act of narrating an alternative genealogy for the field along these lines (which would be to narrate the genealogy of performance studies in which I situate my own practice), I have done so both out of a reticence to reproduce the dynamics of the studies protocols, and also because a counter-history is only one factor in a broader project aimed at disrupting and deconstructing the racializing and colonial dynamics inherent to the field’s studies protocols.

Relatedly, to acknowledge that Muñoz’s or Madison’s projects have not toppled the whiteness and colonial underpinnings of performance studies or performance theory should not be taken as a repudiation of the uses of theory. It should instead be received as a renewed call for deepening their commitment to a struggle against the whiteness and colonial dynamics of the field insofar as they (and others) staged this struggle on the terrain of performance theory. This describes a practice that turns performance theory against its own inheritance from the master’s discourses.

“Philosophy may not want *me*,” writes performance theorist Sandra Ruiz, “but its perpetual obsession with death proves that the field cannot survive without *us* at the limit of existence. Even when we are not written into print, we are on the pages, silently waiting to be wanted alongside the unproblematic universal subject” (Ruiz 2019, 18). Ruiz describes her relationship to theory as an “affinity [that] is ... visible in the twenty years I’ve spent chasing philosophy, determined to see racialized, colonized, sexualized, queer, minoritarian beings at the center of conversations about existence, time, essence, selfhood, authenticity, and freedom” (Ruiz 2019, 18). Doing this, she acknowledges that the provincial discourses of Western epistemology and metaphysics achieve their self-appointed universality against and in relation to the unwanted limit figure(s) of the racialized and colonized. In response, she invites us to see how philosophy, though it performs the disavowal and foreclosure of the minoritarian intellectual, ultimately needs her more than she needs it since “the field cannot survive without *us* at the limit of existence” (Ruiz 2019, 18). Her work—alongside the work of many of the Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, queer, feminist, and trans* of color scholars I have engaged and referenced throughout this chapter—shows us how theory can be turned against this very effect.

In her work, Ruiz performs what Muñoz describes as a “disidentification” with theory and philosophy, working on and against the master’s discourses toward decolonial ends. Her attachment to Frantz Fanon and her engagements with Martin Heidegger, for example, make flesh a hypothetical described by Muñoz when he imagines:

[a] queer revolutionary from the Antilles, perhaps a young woman who has already been burned in Fanon’s text by his writing on the colonized woman ... [as she undertakes] a disidentification with Fanon [that] might be one of the only ways in which she is capable of reformatting the powerful theorist for her own project, that might be as queer and feminist as it is anticolonial (Muñoz 1999, 9).

In critical opposition to the gravitational pull of a whitening studies protocol that asks us to define what performance, performance studies, or performance theory *is* (or *was*), Muñoz offers a blueprint for what performance theory can *do* as it is mobilized against the racializing hierarchies contained and reproduced within the field. What, in other words, can performance theory do to push us toward other horizons of livability and being that go beyond the limits of the studies protocols and their attendant investments in whiteness, “the subject,” “the human,” and even, “the body.”

Notes

- 1 Karl Marx described “primitive accumulation” as the appropriation of land, resources, labor, and other facets of the commons, as they are converted into privately held capital (Marx 1867/1990). Conceding that colonialism was a (if not *the*) major factor in industrial capitalism’s own process of primitive accumulation, he nonetheless callously insists here that “we are not concerned here with the condition of the colonies” (Marx 1867/1990, 940). But the development of the entangled structures of extractive colonialism, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism all necessitated such a concern.
- 2 Irigaray introduced the notion of a “ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly” in *This Sex Which Is Not One* as she describes the phallogocentric ordering of society as organized around “the exclusive valorization of men’s needs/desires, of exchanges among men” (Irigaray 1979/1985, 171). This is, for Irigaray, tethered to the sphere of reproduction as it establishes a matrix of and for History, “in which man begets man as his own likeness” and “wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men” (171–172).
- 3 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Schechner, and Turner’s work all developed universal observations about performance by drawing heavily upon anthropological methods, commonly carried out through ethnographic analysis of racialized modes of performance that unfolded within colonial and postcolonial contexts.
- 4 Watching the dancer, Schechner (1985, 4) wonders “whether putting on the deer mask made the man ‘not a man’ and ‘not a deer’ but somewhere in between.” This move reinforces the racializing logic that affects the animalization of racialized being within western epistemology, as described in the work of Kalpana Rahita Seshadri (2012) and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020).
- 5 The essay was published in *TDR* where, to his credit, Schechner was the editor. Fusco’s critique seems to have made no substantive subsequent impact on the shape of Schechner’s work.
- 6 They reference: Karl Marx, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Henry M. Sayre, Clifford Geertz, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, Christopher Norris, Plato, Lodovico Castrelvetto, August Schlegel, Emile Zola, Richard Wagner, Adolph Appia, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Constantin Stanislavski, Robert Edmond Jones, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, J. L. Austin, Jacques Lacan, Sigmund Freud, Raymond Williams, and Michel Foucault.
- 7 Parker and Sedgwick invoke the Christian Bible, Plato, Aristotle, J. L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Michael Fried, Jean-François Lyotard, Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Foucault, Marx, and even the novelist Henry James. Phelan engages Schechner, Turner, Austin, Freud, Judith Butler, and artists (engaged as theorists) who include Orlan, W. H. Auden, W. B. Yeats, and Samuel Beckett. Davis, who mostly focuses on her contributors (almost all white) references Richard Biernacki, Caroline Bynum, Clifford Geertz, and Stanley Cavell in her introduction.
- 8 Between Reinelt and Roach’s volume, Phelan’s, and Davis, there were about seventy contributors. Only a handful were scholars of color (including E. Patrick Johnson, Sandra Richards, James Moy, Harry Elam, David Román, Mohammad Kowsar, Daphne Lei, May Joseph, Doris Sommer, Amanda Denise Kemp, and Una Chaudhuri).

- 9 This list is by no means definitive, and I also want to honor, here, the work of the scholars noted in endnote 8, as well as work by other scholars who were circulating in (or in sustained conversation with) performance studies by the time that *The Cambridge Companion* was published (with only one scholar of color included out of its twelve contributors). Just some of these scholars include: Cherrie, Moraga, Nicole Fleetwood, Serita Echavez, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Larry La Fountain, Suk-Young Kim, Josephine Lee, Sean Metzger, Jennifer Devere Brody, Jayna Brown, Karen Tongson, Juana María Rodríguez, Soyica Diggs Colbert, Tavia Nyong'o, Nadine George-Graves, Thomas DeFrantz, Eng-Beng Lim, Brandi Wilkins Catanese, Harvey Young, Patricia Ybarra, Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, Christine Balance, Alexandra Vazquez, Ricardo Montez, and Esther Kim Lee.
- 10 Jones, "Live art in art history," 152.
- 11 Jones's essay in *The Cambridge Companion* follows a similar narrative, though it is done in order to place pressure on that tradition. Goldberg's book and Jones's 2008 essay both move through a usual cast of characters: the futurists, dada, Black Mountain, Fluxus, Jackson Pollock, Allan Kaprow, John Cage, Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci.
- 12 Jones, "Live art in art history," 161.
- 13 Da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*, xxxix.

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Technology/Media

INTERNET

“Bias Is Not a Bug. It’s a Feature”: An Interview with Hito Steyerl on Representation in the Digital Age

Hito Steyerl and Anuradha Vikram

Anuradha Vikram

When I was asked to interview Hito Steyerl for this volume, the editors invited us to describe for the reader how representation functions in the present day, when physical space and interaction are increasingly hybridized with digital forms. In Steyerl’s work as an artist and a theorist, she deals with myriad aspects of representation in the digital age, and here we examine some of those aspects. We are concerned with how the existing paradigm for the circuit of global contemporary art preserves inequalities despite democratizing technologies, due to frameworks of monopoly capitalism that descend from and perpetuate European premises and belief systems of the imperial period (see British Museum n.d.).¹ We discuss how museums’ funding structures, patronage, exposure opportunities, and so on are structured in relationship to colonialism and the pathways that were laid during the fifteenth-century formation of the European empire, and we address how emerging technologies including blockchain-based protocols offer both liberatory and restrictive modes of self-representation for artistic creators who must navigate self-interested systems of high finance and security in order to wield the greater independence these instruments proffer.

As popular representation has been increasingly curtailed and redirected into consumption and ideological expression above political resolution at the start of the twenty-first century, the cycle of extraction and exploitation of materials and labor is adapted to include digital formats and data. In the essay “Let’s Talk about Fascism,” Steyerl describes how this results in white supremacy being “a gap in representation itself” such that whiteness and its centrality sets the terms of representation and operates as the unseen “neutral” position (Steyerl 2017, 140). Steyerl outlines political and cultural representation as operating within distinct paradigms of legality and policy, and cultural visibility, both of which are neutralized by a “collapse of representation” in fascism that is “short-circuited by attempts to avoid the complications inherent in it, and to label representation as an alien and foreign concept” (Steyerl 2017, 140). Neocolonialism involves leveraging the pretense of popular will to act in ways that don’t serve the popular interest, which in the information age includes collecting and utilizing data from the public to justify the exploitation of resources and labor.

The interview is divided into five thematic sections, the first dealing with white supremacy as it manifests in data collection and interpretation, the second with proxy agents and fascist tendencies on the Internet and on the blockchain, the third with presentness and authenticity in the age of mass reproduction, the fourth with the financialization of everything, and the fifth with photographic images and the nature of visual truth.²

White Supremacy and the Algorithm

AV: Why are the goals of neocolonialism in the sense of the corporate activity that we see, the violation of state norms with economic norms often, or political power and representation being supplanted by economic or cultural representation—how are these goals to reestablish the same power structure better served, as you say, by “the erosion of political power” (Steyerl 2017, 140) and its replacement with the economic and cultural modes of representation?

HS: There is no rule of law, or not as much, in these spaces. So, one needs other tools, for example, populism. And also there is a different protocol for participation. I mean the democratic modes of participation are far from perfect, but at least they establish a kind of basic protocol of how to involve the population or parts of it into a democratic process. And in the corporate realm, these rules do not exist. You’re a stakeholder, you own something, this is your way of being represented in this realm. Or you are a resource, that’s the other side, which is usually not directly being spoken about. Or, and this is widespread, your face gets shown around if you are a minority to diversity-wash social inequality and injustice. That’s a corporate way of keeping things in place and it irritates me a lot these days, above all in my own professional field.

Actually, this is a feudal mode of representation—in feudalism, the people that mattered were people that own something, be it landowners or the aristocrats—the people who could control the resources. A similar mode is now re-actualized in the corporate scheme. And if there is no other structure, no rule of law or very weak rule of law, widespread corruption, and so on, then this kind of new feudalism becomes predominant.

AV: To move on to the question of identity-based representation, in “Proxy Politics; Signal and Noise,” you mention Jacques Rancière’s construction of speech versus noise, where speech is the *vox populi* and noise is produced by the disenfranchised, and I’m thinking about *Gayatri Spivak* as well, which brings me to ask why you feel that cultural studies as an academic framework that allows for some degree of feedback from the marginalized subject who has been devalued based on racial categorization as Black, Indigenous, or low caste—why is this framework inadequate to describe these shifting terms of representation through the algorithm? (Steyerl 2014, 33). Why can’t we just equate algorithmic bias with racial bias, gender bias, etc.?

HS: Well, in one way it’s fully enough, right? Social bias gets encoded into algorithm, period. But I think it’s also important to understand how exactly the algorithm is encoded because on the inside of the algorithm, the bias is very much obscured by the black box algorithms; it’s much harder to disentangle it from the regime of objective representation. My colleague Trevor Paglen calls this “machine realism,” which means that just because it’s a machine, it tells the truth (Paglen 2018). People used to think that about photography, right? That anything a camera captured was basically a fact, a mechanical fact. And now this is being updated for the machine-learning age, whatever any sort of neural network comes up with must be true because it’s a machine (Figure 30.1).

That’s a very strong fetishism and it’s entirely superstitious to believe that a neural network would come up with the truth, but it is what people do. And it’s difficult to get people to understand that this machine is biased too. [On the one hand,] there need to be



FIGURE 30.1 Hito Steyerl, *The City of Broken Windows*, 2018. Video installation, environment *Broken Windows*, 2018: single channel HD video, color, sound, 6 minutes 40 seconds. *Unbroken Windows*, 2018: single channel HD video, color, sound, 10 minutes. *Environment*: broken glass window, painted plywood panels, vinyl lettering, wood easels. Installation view from Castello di Rivoli, Torino, 2019. Toni Pape (2017) / Taylor & Francis Group / CC BY 4.0; Courtesy of the Artist, Hito Steyerl, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

ways of looking at that bias to trace it, and to also encounter all the findings from machine learning with a healthy dose of skepticism. On the other hand, the idea that one could fix the codial effects [outcomes] of machine learning if you found better ways to recognize minorities is very shallow. In many cases, not being recognized has its advantages. Bias is not a bug. It's a feature.

AV: You used the word "truth." How do you define truth? How do we find truth in representation and media?

HS: I think truth is a bit too big of a word. I would already be very happy if we could talk about factual accuracy, but that also is not necessarily a given in technical representation, whatsoever.

AV: There's two aspects of truth here. There's a way in which this machine realism of data, as you say, gives us a truth. We may or may not be ready to understand the truth that it

represents about us. When I look at the top search terms on Wikipedia, the top 200 search terms, about 50% of them are obscene terms. Because that's what people are looking for. And it's a kind of snapshot of a "general public." That tells me something true.

HS: Yeah, it does absolutely. Right.

AV: But it doesn't tell me anything true about what informed people are using an information site like Wikipedia for, because it's corrupted or overwhelmed with this other, poor data. And that's, I think, where the human element may come in. There's the truth that you don't know how to recognize, that the data gives you, that it does provide, and then there's the falsehood that it presents as truth or is presented as truth. How is representation functioning with respect to these two modes of truth?

HS: In my dissertation, many years ago, I wrote about documentary truth and—to really condense it—I ended up saying [that] the thing represented as content in documentary representation may be factual or not, but there is one layer which will always be a document of itself, namely the traces of production within whatever it is: the file name, if you like, or the EXIF data of a photograph (see Germain 2019).³ There's always some kind of metadata, information that speaks about itself, that speaks about the way it was produced, and so on. And I think on this level, one, there's a lot of factuality there, right? I mean, of course it could be faked, I guess. But it speaks about itself. That's, that's the bare minimum, you know, of what it can do, but it's also already a lot. That's how archaeology works, to a large degree. If you find a shard of a pot somewhere all it can do is not apparent; it will be revealed by the material reality of the fragment, whatever its social and other context could be.

AV: And when you don't have that context, you insert it?

HS: You can project it. Of course.

AV: This is where the questionable nature of "truth" comes in.

HS: Perhaps. Absolutely. There's additionally, two layers to what we're discussing. One is the production of data, which are basically measurement points; those may be accurate or not, but they are just measurement points. Let's assume they are all accurate, 100% accurate [as measures or representations of the data collected]. So, the next layer, and this is where it gets more complicated, is the interpretation: how to make sense of these data points. And this is where human interpretation always becomes very, very important, right? It's always a story which is told about those data points in the attempt to connect all of them into something coherent. But there is, of course, a lot of interpretation there.

Proxies and Bodies

AV: In "Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise," you describe how decentralized proxy networks have supplanted individual people as online agents, using the example of Twitter bots deployed by the conservative AKP party in Turkey to gain votes (Steyerl 2014). I'm going to ask about blockchain now, because it's one of the frames of representation we're talking about in the culture [that is very visible] at the time this interview takes place. Following on a discussion of the algorithmically determined image, censorship on social media apps, asking what's a face and what's a butt and how that hierarchy is determined by human perception rather than a value that's intrinsic to the computer (a discussion I loved), you described DAO (decentralized autonomous organization) entities, which collectivize investment decisions across a community of shareholders in a manner that anonymizes responsibility and therefore accountability for the DAO's collective actions.

You were speaking earlier about corporate versus political representation. If the discourse around democracy is reduced to voting, then the corporation or its social media interface offers us a very similar level of choice. I upvote this or I downvote it, I like it or

I frowny-face it, and I feel empowered. We have choice, we're represented, but in a structure that doesn't change at all depending on what we say. And many people have a similar feeling about representative democracy. We get to choose, I like the Biden-Harris brand better than the Trump-Pence brand, but for people who are excluded from political representation including the unsheltered, the undocumented, and prisoners, the experience of living in the United States in the last year hasn't significantly changed. So, let's talk about how decentralization, rule by algorithms, and the regime of likes are potentially posing threats to popular representational politics. What are some of those threats?

HS: So the blockchain is quickly evolving. It may have several consequences for political representation. First of all, as you already noted, it replaces a classical, liberal, democratic representation procedure with a stakeholder or shareholder procedure. You need to own, you need to buy in, in order to be able to have a say in it. And your say depends on the size of the share you own. So, democracy is being replaced with a shareholder model. That's one aspect; the other aspect, and this seems to crystallize more and more, is that the blockchain is an interesting machine to produce identity as commodity. Why is that? Because as we saw in the NFT [non-fungible token] debate, one peculiar and particular advantage that blockchain seems to give is to assign unique cryptographically congruent identities that are stored [in the information cloud], apparently forever (see Wintermeyer 2021).⁴

Usually digital files can be multiplied without a lot of resources, almost with none, and they are generic. The NFT tries to replace this digital abundance with artificial scarcity and the artificial scarcity is created via assigning unique identities to different assets. Identity and commodity value fall into one. This seems to be for me the main economic function of the Blockchain, the generation of identity as unique and a rare commodity.

AV: Am I understanding correctly how this identity commodification is working in a market sense? Can we apply an understanding of how fragmentation or scarcity renders identity as a commodity within US cultural institutions to the blockchain in any way?

HS: I think that would be the next step. I would need to think it through before jumping to conclusions. [Thinking] more broadly, many institutions find cosmetic ways to look a little more inclusive, especially those in places like the United States or perhaps also [the] Gulf States that have massive income inequality and inequalities in terms of access to social resources. So, some artists of color get called in. They do get included for a show or maybe two, but they do not get included truly into the institution usually [in a structural way]. So, it's quite superficial. What it reminds me of, is Catholics' selling of indulgences. Your institutions are buying indulgences by this kind of superficial inclusion.

Just to take it away from the United States—we had a show here lately called *Diversity United* sponsored by some private impresario under the patronage of Vladimir Putin and paid for by some shady fossil fuel shell company that appears in the Panama Papers for siphoning off taxpayers' money into some offshore bank account (see *berlin.de* 2021).⁵ That's diversity-washing taken quite far.

AV: That's fascinating. I like that analogy of indulgences a lot. I thought about indulgences more in terms of techno-futurists and the idea that you can somehow invest your way to immortal life through, say, uploading your consciousness, but I think that how it's being framed in the States, is as this kind of emotional or symbolic reparation that substitutes for financial and economic, or structural inequalities.

HS: Equal opportunities. On every layer, not just on the layer of being, of including your work in a show, and hanging your face out to dry because next year some other singular identity will be fashionable as an indulgence. That's how it has been working for the past two, three decades.

AV: Back to the idea of the DAO, given that this is very much a developing conversation, how does the DAO give rise to the kind of proxy representation or pirate representation

that you talk about? How does that structure enable the contemporary rise of fascism in your view?

HS: There's barely any DAOs in existence, so we don't really know what we are talking about, but for me, the DAO could be anything, could be a cooperative, could be a guild, could be a mutual aid fund. And this is what I think of, mostly: *Leviathan*. Thomas Hobbes. The image on the cover of this book was of a monster made of many tiny individuals (see Hobbes 1651).⁶

The idea that every person, just by the fact of being, has a right to matter, to be represented politically and otherwise is replaced with a property right [system that reduces participants to] a shareholder or a stakeholder.

Isn't the labor that is apparently being "saved" [by automation] the one that enables participation? Of course a lot of it is tedious but on the other hand, is governance a product or a process?

AV: So then the connection between fascism and this model, if I'm understanding what you were saying in respect to the Twitter bots correctly, as constituting a type of DAO, was that by no longer being individually accountable, we essentially enable ideas that no one wants to be personally associated with to proliferate unchecked.

HS: Not sure, but I think that fascism is connected to Twitter bots in a different way. Fascism is always an attempt to manufacture a real people, a *vox populi*, there's always some group which claims to be the "real people," the "silent majority" or that type of population. And the Twitter bots are basically their expression. They are completely artificial, but they are supposed to voice this point of view of the real people, which always implies that there's also [another] part of the population, which is not real, which does not count, which one needs to get rid of. I live in Germany, and this always brings up the continuation of the phrase, "which needs to be exterminated." That's also something that's at play in the construction of the "real people."

AV: And this *vox populi* that you describe is one that is intended to legitimate decisions that benefit only a very small community of the population a lot of the time. So, therefore they have to be fabricated.

HS: Yes. I would say that it's a fabrication. Right. It's trying to legitimate the interests of a minority by disguising them as a popular dictum.

AV: Did the bots come about because the regular, everyday Twitter trolls weren't numerous enough? It does seem like there are real people out there who are willing to do this work on behalf of the regime. Why automate this and disenfranchise it from actual beings to that extent?

HS: True. This text ["Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise"] was probably written in 2014, so that was also a different era. For example, the AKP bots [run by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) in Turkey] have been more or less retired because it became just too obvious. But I think by now they also don't need them, because there's enough people who are willing to do the same job. So, the bots stood in as proxies for the coming fascists.

AV: It does seem like the bot world of trolls and comments is really manifesting in in-person spaces. That's the aftermath of the Capitol Riot here in the United States, as if right-wing Twitter or Reddit just suddenly appeared in person. And then went back away to online and tried to claim that they didn't really exist in person at all, despite evidence to the contrary on social media.

HS: This is a way to conjure up people by invoking them. If you invoke them for long enough, they will start appearing and materializing and, and I think that's one example, of the powers of companies and algorithms to bring about these kinds of dynamics. As we said before—there is no rule of law but populism, the dictates of clickbait, quantity, and popularity. And because divisiveness is entertaining, it will work best in this environment.

AV: My next question is about the body. I think we always come back to the question of embodiment and liveness, and obviously there's a critique of the very idea of liveness embedded in this whole conversation. I mean, is this a live conversation right now? Is it a simulated simultaneous conversation? The question that you ask in "Let's Talk about Fascism" is, would we be able to have a butt book? Could we identify each other by this other aspect of our anatomy? And of course that's absurd. And I think it's delightful because the idea that we are represented by our heads, our faces, is based in Enlightenment hierarchies of how the body and the intellect and culture and gender all peak in this particular form of the educated white heterosexual man, or maybe not so heterosexual, but man at the top of the intellectual pyramid and governance structure and what have you. So, if in fact the cerebral and the visual are privileged in the realm of Western thought, then my argument is that defecation or the anus is actually what keeps us human, especially in a posthuman world. I like to think of it as an Asian idea, one that I attributed to Nam June Paik.⁷ What happens to the body when we become posthuman?

In "Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise," you used the word "pornstar" to describe the AKP bot Hakan43020638 (Steyerl 2014, 33). Where's the pornography, where's the body? Obviously, those are not the same thing. Where is the anus in the Twitter bot?

HS: What I was trying to say [in "Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise"], when I was trying to analyze the economy of presence, [is that] that there is a certain type of presence, which can be commodified very easily, in fact, because it fulfills similar criteria that the NFT presumably also fulfills: that it's not easily reproducible. If the presence of the person cannot easily be multiplied, it remains scarce and thus has a value. Now the question is: Where are all these bodies, where are all these presences that cannot be commodified through this protocol, or which are deemed to have no value from the get-go? Those do not matter in the economy of presence.

AV: I'm trying to understand this as well as I can. And something that strikes me is that so often the way we perceive the mediated body, especially on the Internet but not exclusively, is in fragments and parts. And that if you offer up the body in parts as a commodity, you can monetize the same one body over and over and over through its collection of parts. And I also think, you know, at this point where our culture is saturated with the photographic image, we figured out a way to basically commodify every body part and every bodily function through pornography. But I'm curious to know what happens to the whole body or the unified idea of a physical and mental self here. Does it exist?

HS: As a former bondage model, I'm able to tell you that the body can also be commodified as a whole, it doesn't need to be fragmented, but also look at Instagram, we don't even need to go to pornography to look at the cognitive suffocation of bodies and body images, and it doesn't really matter whether they are fragmented or what sort of ideal bodies they're trying to emulate. I think that the commodification of the body is quite advanced and went way beyond pornography, which is one extreme manifestation of it. But if you look at it, at an influencer feed, it's usually just trying to approximate other commodifiable bodies which they have seen.

AV: In "The Terror of Total Dasein: Economies of Presence in the Art Field" you recount how a sense of permanent availability in a suspended state of agency has come to characterize contemporary work environments, as well as art spaces or art (Steyerl n.d.). I found this very much in my own experience as an art worker, that curatorial positions demand constant presence in this sense and post-object art practice demands this constant presence and availability. So, how has this presentness been opposed to representation in an aesthetic frame and in a labor frame?

HS: As I said, presentness is an attempt to create scarcity again, because you cannot multiply it indefinitely. One example: as a mother I am dependent on being able to send artworks to somewhere and not go, because I just am not free to do it. So, if art is constantly calling

upon you to be present, then it becomes a problem, and I am out of a job. I'm basically dependent on representations being able to do the art function. Otherwise I cannot function in this frame. And I think that says a lot about the labor frame, right? So, if art or performance or whatever it is, requires your presence, then it very much shrinks down the pool of people who are able to perform it to mostly younger, mobile, able-bodied people who even don't need any money to do it because they have other resources, or to people who have no care duties. So, it's basically another attempt to shrink the labor force.

AV: That's such a great hack as a working mother.

HS: I couldn't do it otherwise, you know? Just send a video file, tell them to deal with it. I'm not going to come. NFT that.

Financialization

AV: With the onset of NFTs and blockchain-based financial instruments that fuel investment in dematerialized manifestations of art and other commodities, is the artwork or the commodity object in fact required anymore? Reading your two older essays, "In Defense of the Poor Image," and "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," I have more of an image question: how is the algorithmic aggregate supplanting the personal in the realm of art? (See Steyerl 2013a). And is the artwork being replaced by the facsimile of the artwork or some proxy for the artwork here?

HS: Technically that really is the case, right? The artwork is not the NFT. The NFT is just a hash [value],⁸ which stands in for the artwork (see Faife 2017). You can do without that work. It's not a problem. It's entirely superfluous to the whole equation. But I think the art is required as reward as well. A giveaway for PR purposes? You need it to create a tension around the financial instrument. You need it to pretend there is some interesting activity/casino/lottery/market going on. Because otherwise, why would people want to engage with it? So, it's a pretext in my view to enable and also implement a new financial infrastructure based on crypto, speculation in art is used as an educational tool. And me, and probably also you, we're engaging in this kind of educational activity for free all the time, trying to explain how things work, thereby also providing services for the crypto industry to introduce their products. And I think art is crucial as a sort of decoy or hook to get people interested in all of that, especially if apparently it is very expensive. So, it's not entirely superfluous, but not because it's art, but because it gets people to do things, which otherwise they wouldn't do.

AV: Something that I've been hearing too, is that art is interesting in the space because it already has agreed-upon value, which crypto fundamentally does not. So, to get more people to agree that crypto has value, they need to engage with more things that already have value that people can agree on, such as art.

HS: Yes. If you look at traditional art, then it is already a non-fungible token, meaning there are not so many artworks which are exactly the same as others, right? Usually, every artwork is its own thing. Also, there is the social idea that artworks have value if they are being defined as artworks. So, they are NFTs already. The art market is just an exchange market for artworks, which are NFTs anyway. Now you get rid of the artwork and have it replaced by a hash, but the same ideological structure and the pre-formed beliefs around art and value and so on are still in place. It's just, you don't need the art anymore.

Nor the artists. This is counter-intuitive because there's a lot of new digital artists who have joined this market. But the interesting thing is that it is but one first step in the automation of the art world. And if you look at how the NFT world is structured now, you realize that a lot of parts of the traditional art world are missing, which are mainly

the ones to do with education, with academia, with writing; there is very little NFT criticism. Curators, non-profits, for example, almost all of this is missing. The bare bones are left, which is the auction houses, the platforms, and then some artists, but because many of the artworks are generative, the first steps of automation are introduced also on the artist level.

AV: What I'm hearing from artists who are doing it, is someone's got to sell them. So, if you're not already represented and working with someone who's going to represent you in that way to NFT collectors, then it's a good thing that the artist's labor isn't needed because now you're your own dealer.

HS: Yeah. But do all artists sell? Because what I'm hearing is, if you just drop stuff on the platforms, no one will notice, right? Either you're on the big platforms, which are already like galleries because they are by invitation, or you just disappear in the whole onslaught of other NFTs. So, in that sense, the middleman hasn't really disappeared, it just has shifted to new entities.

Anecdotally, what I hear is many people from non-Western countries, Eastern Europe, Latin America—seeing a chance and also being very much under pressure because of pandemia [the conditions of pandemic culture]—have tried to enter the market, getting into debt, but not managing to sell, which is kind of sad. I mean, I'm not claiming this as representative, probably there are also counterexamples which I don't know about. This is just what I hear.

AV: Leading from that idea, the next question is, in "Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation" you write of a popular refusal taking place, in which the public removes themselves from view within a culture of constant surveillance (Steyerl 2013, 166). This appealed to me because it rejects the circular logic that critiques of capitalism very often reinscribe that system's ubiquity, as we've discussed. If, for example, we withdraw from social media as a way of taking back control of our data body from these entities that want to monetize it and feed it to the algorithm, especially now with the pandemic, can the disenfranchised people who don't have relationships and connections to work in the traditional space afford to drop out of this simulated network?

HS: Probably not. And one of the, one of the many, very harsh aspects of pandemia is that dependency on corporate digital platforms was highly increased. There was no other better way to communicate for many people. But it doesn't mean that it is ideal, right? It just means that pandemia was a stroke of luck for the big communication corporations. That was a win-win situation for them. What should have existed, or what I would like to see come into existence would be digital platforms, which are not under the control of these corporations, which would be self-organized or municipal or could even take on the form of DAOs, if you like, doesn't really matter, but people would regain some control over their data. They would be able to decide whether and how they want to monetize it or not, because the data that are monetized now, all the benefit goes to the corporations, which appropriate it.⁹ So, I think pandemia has thrown that into stark relief. I'm not saying that people who have to be on social media, including artists (for many of them, social media is a platform to promote their work) [should leave social media]. I'm not saying this can be replaced from one day to another, but trying would be a first step.

AV: What I'm hearing is that, on the one hand, alternative networks can appear, so that people can engage in the space without participating in these extractive systems? And then another mode is this idea that people can individually autonomously control selective aspects of their personal data and have the decision-making capacity: this data plugs in here via the blockchain, and when I unplug it, no trace of my personal data remains with Facebook or whoever might profit from it?

HS: All of that has been modeled already. Municipal data platforms, for example, which belong to the population and are managed by the municipality, in which people would be in control not only of their own personal data, which they could choose to monetize or not, but also more importantly of the aggregate data, because that's also valuable. The big data of a city is more valuable than the sum of all the individual data. But of course this entity, let's say the city, could also decide to own this kind of data and to redistribute the proceedings or to reinvest in the infrastructure or whatever. It's not rocket science. People have found ways to do it already. So, the idea that Facebook is the only possible digital sphere is just quite lazy.

AV: The next question is about "In Defense of the Poor Image" (Steyerl 2013, 32–44). In that essay, you explain how the precise and sometimes cost-prohibitive requirements of mid-century filmmakers and media image makers in terms of expectations for how their films would be presented and shown, combined with the relatively low monetization potential for experimental cinema, ultimately made their works too expensive for the market to support and so placed outside the realm of circulation by official means. As a result, distribution of these works now becomes available to the public exclusively in a degraded form through online aggregators such as YouTube, Vimeo, or Ubu Web. You make a connection between that reality and the disappearance of official support for noncommercial art forms by the state, as the state is disintegrating and being replaced by privatization. And you talk about poor image resolution, but you also talk about poor image content, which we discussed in terms of spam images or pornography. Looking back on that essay now through the lens of the rise of AI [artificial intelligence], deep dreaming, and other image generation techniques that you discussed in your subsequent book *Duty-Free Art*, do you understand the revolutionary potential of the poor image in the same way as you did before? How has it evolved?

HS: Oh, no, definitely not. I mean, the poor image that I was describing was still in a 4:3 ratio. It was around maybe 2006, 2007, and then it was gone. Now the HD image is the standard image. It's the new poor image, if you like, and resolution has become replaced with reach or velocity. So, in the "poor image" era, which runs maybe until 2010, roughly, we have resolution still as a factor, but then it's the next era of the web 2.0, in which basically there is another formula. It's not just resolution, but something like resolution and reach and velocity. So, matter and energy both become important. The resolution as such is not really that important anymore in the meme era. And this now gets upgraded again in the NFT era with corresponds to web 3.0, when resolution as such doesn't matter at all, but it's reach and financialization which create the aura, not resolution. So, basically, the modes of valorization shift a lot over the decades, and a poor image today is the one that's not cryptographically made pseudo-unique, but which exists in abundance and multiplicity for free. That's the poor image. It hasn't been assigned any sort of unique identity. It is a generic copy and that constitutes its poverty.

AV: Two things came to mind. One is the Nyan Cat GIF that was also created as an NFT, where it is both the poor image that belongs to no one and everyone, and now has this unique identifier that someone claims to own. And the other is Pepe the Frog, the meme that the alt-right popularized that the Hong Kong democracy protestors then picked up and used in their own movement as a symbol of resistance. So, I'm thinking about these two forms of poor image, in a sense, can you talk to me a little bit about them?

HS: Well, we can talk about the images of course, but let's talk about them as NFTs. The Pepe was also a coin, a crypto coin that at some point was used by Venezuelans to escape their own currency and their own cryptocurrency, which is the Petro. So, they invested in Pepecoin for a while. So, if we talk about them as crypto items, then there is the whole geopolitical aspect also attached to it, because right now under the current technology, almost all NFTs are minted on the Ethereum blockchain. And anytime an NFT is minted,

a mining rig in some unacknowledged para-state territory fires up, right? It's interesting that many of those mining rigs are in territories which are disputed, for example, Abkhazia, Kosovo, Transnistria, and so on. And so all of these are territories where a solid state structure does not exist, where there are energy disputes and for some reason the energy price is really low. There is definitely a direct connection between the minting of the Nyan Cat, the creation of this unique traceable identity/commodity, and the massive energy costs that literally put power stations on fire, because a lot of the electrical infrastructure is in those places. So, basically anytime you mint one, you create a fire in some other region of the world and those geopolitical aspects have been barely explored, but they also belong to the whole chain of production of this new kind of asset. Having said that, this might change in the future because of less energy intense processes, but right now this is the way it is.

Photography and the Truth of Images

AV: To move to photography and the image, in the “Spam of the Earth” article you cite Ariella Azoulay in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, saying that the photograph as a civil contract representing a shared basis for collective memory operates—I’m rephrasing here to bring in Heidegger—as evidence of an inescapable real (Steyerl 2013, 170). I’ve always been really interested in that question, of what is real that we don’t perceive or the real that exists underneath the simulation. I understand Azoulay’s photograph as forcing a negotiation between carriers of divergent memories by presenting a baseline accounting of certain mutually agreed upon facts of the fleeting event (Azoulay 2008, 11–14). Does that sound accurate to you, that what she’s saying is that the photograph provides a record that means that everyone who has their own version of events has to negotiate that version and one another around the record of the photograph that exists?

HS: Yes, yes. Let me just give you two examples of how differently this could play out, the civil contract of photography. Two diametrically opposed examples of this process, which is a very insightful, interesting way to describe the political negotiations embedded in photography. If you remember the LA riots [of 1992], [which followed on] the beating of Rodney King [in 1991], there was a video of that. And it was basically on show, on trial in court, and it was played back frame by frame in a way that it was entirely possible to dismiss this evidence, even though it showed what had happened, quite clearly. Compare this to the showing of the video of George Floyd’s death in court [captured on cell phone video in 2020], and the completely different verdict that the jury came to. What I’m trying to say is that the civil contract of photography is present in both. The contract just changed in the meantime. The contract of how to see and interpret photographic evidence changed from one case to the other. But it was entirely possible, in 1992, to completely dismiss the videographic evidence and to agree there was nothing to see there.

AV: So in 1992, it seems the voices of people who were witness to King being beaten, the videographer [George Halliday] and others who were there to attest to the police brutality, were generally dismissed by the jury as noise, and the version that was delivered by the police officers was accepted as true information. Whereas today, both sides were viewed as having information that was valid and admissible. Would you say that’s part of the reason, or a reason?

HS: I think the social and political discourse about interpretation, and not only interpretation but racism as a whole, has changed a lot. That’s the reason. But the photographic evidence is comparable, it’s of course not the same, but basically on the base of very similar evidence two juries reached very different verdicts. And this is not because of the evidence, it’s because of the discourse surrounding the interpretation of the evidence (see Ristovska 2021).¹⁰ This is why many of the forensic counterevidence projects fall flat. Because in

many cases there isn't even a jury let alone a social contract which would find visual evidence of any value.

AV: That shift may also be influenced by the history of civil uprising in Los Angeles after the other verdict was returned. I wonder to what extent that action of people in the street—that dropping out of the discourse of representation to enact a different politics—has influenced that conversation. I do think your point is well taken, and I do think there's something to be said for the fact that LA recently acknowledged its anniversary of the 1992 event. The twenty-fifth anniversary in 2017 was an event here, of people making work about it, talking about it, having symposia discussions, all of this, then the Black Lives Matter protests that happened in 2020, very much in Los Angeles, people being in the street. I do feel like obviously the movement was all over the country and there were people on the street in Minneapolis and people on the street in St. Louis and so I wonder about that people pressure, if we hadn't had that acknowledgment, that commemoration, that anniversary, that resurgence of interest in the earlier event, would we have seen the Floyd verdict? But that's speculative, so I'm not sure how much you want to comment on that.

HS: Yeah. But it's fair, because there is this theory that historical events or traumas or strong memories only can be articulated later, years later, and usually around the second event, and maybe something similar happened. That something couldn't be expressed the first time, but then definitely broke its way through, I won't say the second time, because probably it was the five hundred thousandth time. But it took a while for that to even reach this threshold of being sayable and believable.

AV: That relates again to the notion of the irreducible “real” or (in Heidegger's terms) *Dasein*, of the event that is unable to be apprehended on recollection. Regarding the truthfulness of photography, I'm curious about how you think about that, whether those images can be made, whether images that meet with Azoulay's terms of collective historical narrative can be made under the terms of simulation that you've described? You write, “the people might happen by jointly making an image and not being represented in one” (Steyerl 2013, 172). How do we make that happen?

HS: I was just trying to reverse it. “The people” is not everyone who is in an image, but “the people” is everyone who contributes to an image in a way quite similar to the civil contract of photography definition. And it is the case, many images today are made jointly, even though that cooperation is again extracted or appropriated by platforms. That would be a more interesting way to think about politics in images. Then again it could also lapse into the shareholder model, meaning you can also think about people sharing in an image by attributing property rights. So, let's say the person represented gets 53% and so it is fractionalized and divided up again into private shares. Which is, again, an idea that relates to DAOs and the NFT and so on.

So, not going the route of fractionalization, and keeping things as a common property, would be maybe an interesting way to go.

AV: If the current withdrawal from representation is the breaking of a social contract, how might this refusal be put to use politically? You spoke a little bit about non-Facebook platforms. Let's talk about the physical world now. If our activism often seems to be stuck in a cultural or symbolic realm, how does strategic disappearance potentially resurrect our agency with respect to political representation? How can we disappear from the Democratic Party, or other political bodies that treat progressive politics as an anomaly, in a meaningful way? (See Fram 2021).¹¹

HS: I was thinking about Zapatistas, who always made a point of appearing masked and who said that basically their own collectivity was expressed by disappearing behind the mask. There's interesting dialectical model stuff, being both withdrawn and present, maybe visible but not trackable. Masks [during COVID-19] were such a charged topic—at least here in Europe, [anti-mask sentiments happened] because of a huge amount of anti-Asian

resentment; it was kind of incredible. I had the feeling that a big part of the [white European] population resented masks because of no better reason than not wanting to look Asian. Most of this population would rather fall ill, then be confused with an Asian person. But that was the reality, frankly, such resistance to not being seen, not being able to present your white face to the public. Very, very peculiar. I love the masks. I remember that when young Japanese women were asked why they liked masks they said that it spares them the constant affective labor of smiling.

AV: When I came to your work, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (Figure 30.2), it was in the post-9/11 context of being a South Asian American, having this sense of, if I put a scarf over my head because it's raining, are people going to treat me a different way? (Steyerl 2013). And I know in many parts of Europe, there are laws governing whether women can appear in public with veils. I don't know if any of these have been passed in Germany. I know they've been passed in France, but I think about this already as a charged question of whether you're allowed to go out in public with any part of your head or face obscured and how selectively that's applied. And then you add the mask dimension on the one hand, where people are so anti-mask and fervently so because they're already invested in that discourse of, to reveal yourself, to be visible is to participate is to be represented. And then maybe to your other point, when the Black Lives Matter demonstrations happened in 2020, there was a certain solidarity in everyone being out and being masked and knowing that your identity was somewhat protected from police and seeing one another in this way that maybe didn't make the race of the person the first thing you see. Do you have thoughts about that?

HS: Oh, absolutely. I think that's very close to the Zapatistas, not why they were wearing the masks in the first place, but also in order not to be recognized by police. So, I think one has to keep these examples in mind when suggesting that everyone has to be visible all the time, because that can be counterproductive and dangerous for many reasons. I agree there needs to be visibility in terms of rights and participation, but sometimes it can be quite a threat to be visible. And these laws have existed for a long time, masking being outlawed at demonstrations, at riots, this crazy example of how masks were outlawed in New York at the beginning of the twentieth century because there was a riot in which people had donned Native American costumes. And the consequence was basically to outlaw all masks. It was a really twisted example.



FIGURE 30.2 Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013 HD video, single screen in architectural environment, 15 minutes, 52 seconds. Toni Pape (2017) / Taylor & Francis Group / CC BY 4.0; Courtesy of the Artist, Hito Steyerl, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York and Esther Schipper, Berlin.

AV: The right to not be seen is such a fundamental, often overlooked right. Édouard Glissant says, “we demand the right to opacity,” meaning that we have the right to live together in our difference and not expect to fully understand or perceive one another to coexist in peace (Glissant 2010, 189). Your example speaks to how far the state will go to inhibit or prohibit that right to opacity, the right to be represented on one’s own terms or not at all.

Notes

- 1 The Imperial Period in Europe between the fifteenth and the early twentieth centuries, was the era when museums as we know them emerged as a byproduct of colonial culture.
- 2 This conversation took place over Zoom between Berlin and Los Angeles on June 9, 2021, in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 EXIF Data is the metadata associated with a digital image.
- 4 February 2021 saw an unprecedented level of interest in non-fungible tokens for art, sports memorabilia, music, and other collectibles.
- 5 *Diversity United* was an exhibition at Berlin’s Templehof airport from June 9 to October 10, 2021, which addressed “freedom and democracy, migration and territory, but also political and personal identity” through the works of approximately ninety artists from over thirty countries. Nine of the ninety participants in “Diversity United” withdrew from the exhibition in protest over connections between the curator, Walter Smerling, and hard-right politicians in Germany as well as Vladimir Putin’s government in Russia. See Mattei (2022).
- 6 The frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes’ original 1651 printing of *Leviathan* featured an engraving by Abraham Bosse showing the enlarged figure of a king standing over the landscape, with his torso made up of a multitude of smaller figures.
- 7 Nam June Paik’s *Robot K-456* (1964) defecated beans, had nipples and an anus, and ambulated independently (by remote control). In my essay “Becoming Human, Nam June Paik’s Futuristic Compassion,” I argued that Paik’s scatological robot violated the terms of progress dictated by the Western Enlightenment by privileging anality and the animalistic aspects of liveness (Vikram 2015).
- 8 A hash value is the output of a cryptographic hash function, which translates an input (such as the metadata connected to a work of art) into a sequence of numbers and letters of a fixed length that can be securely verified.
- 9 At the time of this writing, platforms led by critics and curators are emerging into the NFT space, such as *Outland*, led by curator Christopher Y. Lew and writer Brian Droitcour. See *Outland*, available at: <https://outland.art>, accessed May 13, 2022.
- 10 While the public was exposed to bystander video footage of Rodney King’s assault via television broadcast, the Floyd killing was documented in multiple bystander videos simultaneously and disseminated more widely at a much faster pace over the Internet.
- 11 The election of President Joseph R. Biden in 2019 challenged the solidarity that had been established between liberal and progressive factions within the Democratic Party under Trump.

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SOCIAL MEDIA

Why Is It So Hard to Look the Other in the Eye? The Selfie and its Discontents

Derek Murray

During the identity debates of the late 1980s and early 1990s in the United States, there emerged a divisive conversation about representational forms of recognition engendered by so-called underrepresented or minoritized artists. In contemporary art practices of the late twentieth century, the self-image became a powerful means of visual opposition to the representational regimes that either ignored or maligned minoritized constituencies. In my own scholarship, I have begun to reflect on these past debates, primarily because the rise of self-imaging online, what we know now as the selfie, has ignited a very rich multidisciplinary conversation about the complexities of media, technology, identity, consumerist capitalism, and mental health. The ubiquity of the selfie in contemporary life has emerged as a challenge to our current understandings of identity, belongingness, and the rapaciousness of online, techno-capitalism. The selfie tends to exacerbate existing anxieties wrought by technology's seeming ability to compel us not only to consume but to encourage our enthusiastic participation in the dismantling of individual privacy. Technophobia has, in many ways, informed how discussions of online cultures have evolved, especially in the discourses of the social sciences. Selfies in particular are viewed as a symptom of a society trapped by increasingly insidious forms of social control, where self-obsession is *de rigueur*.

This chapter aims to shed light on a critical impasse that informs how scholars of visual culture view and understand this social phenomenon that has transformed our relationship to the visual order. The scholarly conversation about selfies occurs almost exclusively within the social sciences, which often tends toward the goal of distilling generalizable principles from large sample groups. For example, visual sociologists Dennis Zuev and Gary Bratchford characterize the act of self-visualization within social media as engagement with what they have termed the attention economy:

The presentation of the self has multiple forms and allows for multiple modes of social and political expression. We can ... perform the person we want to be or the person we hope to be seen as. Through our daily routines, we can perform as the consumer (presenting ourselves with shopping bags), the winner, the traveler, the activist and the feminist. ...

To bring the act into being whilst placing the emphasis on the performance of self-visualization plays an important role, firstly as an empowering and perhaps emancipatory act but also as a way to frame the event as both global and local or “glocal.” We also perform our gender, sexuality, race and class through visual social media, with different platforms driven by the economics of attention. In doing so, we play out different roles to fit the norms and conventions of each social media space in order to attract the specific form of visual-social conversation (Zuev and Bratchford 2020, 91).

Zuev and Bratchford are not wrong in their assessments, but their approach to pondering the visual practices of online participation engages primarily with sociological modes of investigating the habits of social groups. There is very little direct consideration of the performed intimacies, subjective longings, and desires of individual image-makers, nor does it consider the intersubjective forms of recognition and visibility that drive the attention economy. There is a strong reluctance to discuss the individual motivations that drive online self-imaging, as well as the complex visual specificities of the practice. It does not seem possible to fully comprehend the representational complexities of Internet-based forms of photography by eliding art historical concerns, yet the big data approach to the consideration of these forms still holds precedence over its scholarly consideration in terms of histories of visual technologies and questions of visibility. Art history and visual studies have been largely absent from the discussion, although when it has been undertaken, it tends to be utilized as a means to reanimate, or more aptly recuperate, an engagement with the conventional formal self-portraiture from the Western art historical canon. Esteemed scholars such as Nicholas Mirzoeff have begun to write about selfies through the lens of art history, and in some respects, have reanimated an engagement with the self-portrait historically (Mirzoeff 2016). This makes sense to a certain degree because self-portraiture is a neglected genre in the histories of art—yet these histories (and the discourses engendered to illuminate them) were never very interested in the more-messy concerns of gender, race, and sexuality that subtend the formal considerations that always take precedence within the discipline. (For alternative art historical conversations about the complexities of identity and self-representation, see Jones 2006).¹ Art History has traditionally maintained a stance of disinterest in relation to identity politics, which has led to the rampant misinterpretation of art works, in favor of rigidly formal engagements with works of art that prioritize medium specificity, essential form, and aesthetics.

Art History, Media Approaches, and the Selfie

If art historians and visual culture scholars are to understand online self-imaging, we must look beyond the art historical canon for inspiration and engage with critical conversations concerned with the relations among representation/self-representation, subjectivity, the gaze, and the intricacies of identity and the visual. In the past five years, the discipline has seen the beginnings of a shift toward the recognition of underrepresented scholars, artists, and the recuperation of histories that have been ignored—but there is still a logic of intellectual and cultural segregation that relegates histories and identities to essentialized and prescribed disciplinary and intellectual positions. The histories and canons of art are still most often ethnically delineated, and there are unresolved tensions regarding how identity and difference should be addressed.

The identity debates that were waged so contentiously during the era of multiculturalism (the 1990s in the United States and shortly after in Europe) remain as relevant as ever, even despite the wide perception that those conversations are now exhausted. The institutions and discourses of art in the United States have always mirrored the intolerances and biases of the larger society, and while these structures and conversations—particularly in the art

world—have become increasingly savvy at symbolic acknowledgments, virtue signaling, and performative allyship and are less overtly invested in restrictive and belligerent stances toward minoritized constituencies—there remains an effort to both encourage and maintain discreet and siloed histories, discourses and intellectual legacies along ethnic and gendered lines.

The selfie recenters the self within our conversations about the visual, even while society is becoming more depersonalized, and increasingly reliant upon technology for modes of communication and social interaction. Given its long history of developing tools to address the specific ways in which images are made, circulated, and signify in society, art history has something vital to offer the selfie debate, although clearly the phenomenon of self-imaging online holds the potential to add greater complexity to the discipline's engagement with image production beyond the traditional arts. That said, to fully grasp the complexities of online cultures requires a distinctly multidisciplinary approach: one that fully embraces the diverse methodologies and practices of multiple disciplines and fields. The image cultures of the twenty-first century draw upon not just an increasingly sophisticated understanding of visibility, but also a keen appreciation for Internet-based technologies, algorithms, economics, and marketing (including marketing of the self or branding). However, despite the cyber-utopic rhetoric around social media that often fuels a false sense of democratization and equity, Internet technologies, as art historian Janet Kraynak argues, often lead to greater disenfranchisement:

From a sociological perspective, studies have demonstrated that when it comes to social media, network effects translate into further advantage for already advantaged or dominant groups, thereby exacerbating rather than abating social inequality and further marginalizing already marginalized groups. As a communications platform (and media company, despite its claims to the contrary), Facebook's power in the realm of speech has rapidly grown, and as such, its role in the production of the public sphere is as or potentially more consequential (and dangerous) than its economic might. Contrary to its idealistic proclamations about "making the world more open and connected," as its early mission statement proclaimed, social networks, over the past decade, have become conduits not of equality but of fierce inequality (Kraynak 2020, 1).

Kraynak is correct that the utopian promise of networked technologies has been misleading, yet we have seen how, despite the hegemony of corporate techno-capitalism, the Internet has also created the opportunity for a myriad of overlooked and maligned constituencies to have visibility on their own terms, and to push back against their erasure and misrepresentation by powerful industries that were traditionally closed or hostile to them. Despite the forms of visibility and activism, there continues to be significant backlash against these seemingly more optimistic effects. Within the selfie conversation, several themes have emerged, many of which are concerned with a combustible mixture of rampant consumerism, self-obsession, and the increasing hegemony of surveillance as a public good. In the popular domain, such negative sentiments are so forcefully prevalent that they have cemented a view of particular expressions of online participation as both silly and corrosive. Popular Canadian-American writer and journalist Jia Tolentino has thus emerged as one of the influential voices expressing caution around the techno-inspired, consumer driven tendency toward self-representation. In her *The New York Times* bestselling collection of essays *Trick Mirror*, she rather forcefully critiques the more problematic dimensions of online cultures:

[T]he internet adds a host of other nightmarish metaphorical structures: the mirror, the echo, the panopticon. As we move about the internet, our personal data is tracked, recorded, and resold by a series of corporations—a regime of involuntary technological surveillance, which subconsciously decreases our resistance to the practice of voluntary self-surveillance on social media... On social media platforms, everything we see

corresponds to our conscious choices and algorithmically guided preferences, and all news and culture and interpersonal interaction are filtered through the home base of the profile. This everyday madness perpetuated by the internet is the madness of this architecture, which positions personal identity as the center of the universe (Tolentino 2019, 14).

Tolentino's sentiments echo widely accepted anxieties about technology that are in stark contrast to the often-utopian fetishization of technological innovation that is so prevalent in the twenty-first century. Her words reflect the growing negative sentiment pervasive in intellectual discourses, yet others still express a faithful adherence to the merits of technology as a culturally transformative force for good. (For additional writing about the perils of techno-utopianism, see Marantz (2019).² Despite the very visible and tangible detriments posed by these forms of social media display and connection, it is the elevation of the self demanded by their structures that tends to be most concerning for scholars and pundits. In the popular domain, there have been other formulations that argue stridently against the kind of unabashed visibility that defines the Internet age. Writer Akiko Busch argues that "visibility has become the common currency of our time, and the twin circumstances of social media and the surveillance economy have redefined the way we live" (Busch 2019, 4). In response to the modern condition of ceaseless visibility and performative subjecthood, Busch makes a compelling case for reevaluating "the merits of the inconspicuous life," that we must "search out some antidote to continuous exposure, and to reconsider the value of going unseen, undetected, or overlooked in this new world" (Busch 2019, 9).

Scholar Henry Giroux makes a similar argument, albeit from a more distinctly anti-capitalist position. Giroux laments the rampant anti-intellectualism of online cultures, the rising power of major corporations, the loss of privacy via new modes of surveillance, the rise of propaganda in the form of fake news, and the narcissistic elevation of the self as a corrosive feature of our current cultural moment. In Giroux's words:

a vision of the good society has now been replaced with visions of individual happiness characterized by an endless search for instant gratification and self-recognition. The personal appears to be the only politics that matters in providing both emotional gratification and a tangible referent for negotiating social problems (Giroux 2015, 155).

The intention of Giroux's essay is to explore the relation between selfie culture and corporate and state surveillance. The realities of corporate, political, and state influence over consumer habits online are well-known and social media sites like Instagram have become increasingly sophisticated platforms for advertising and product placement. Giroux is indeed correct in his assessment of social media in particular as a corporate-controlled space that is simultaneously engaged in data tracking and social engineering. These conditions have ideologically perverted notions of privacy away from what the scholar calls a precious political right, to a condition one must escape. In other words, social media platforms, in their elevation of the individual, encourage the abandoning of individual privacies in favor an unabashedly public and, to some degree branded, existence. Moreover, as Giroux aptly articulates, social media "acculturates the public into accepting the intrusion of surveillance technologies and privatized commodified values into all aspects of their lives" (Giroux 2015, 156). The concern here is the tendency for social media users to give up their privacy in exchange for superficial "likes" and validation of followers, even despite the corporate endgame of data harvesting and the encouraging of endless online shopping:

American society is in the grip of a paralyzing infantilism, marked by a crisis of history, memory, and agency. Everywhere we look, the refusal to think, interrogate troubling knowledge, and welcome robust dialogue and engaged forms of pedagogy are now met by the fog of rigidity, anti-intellectualism and a collapse of the public into the private. A

politics of intense privatization and its embrace of the self as the only viable unit of agency appears to have a strong grip on American society, as can be seen in the endless attacks on reason, truth, critical thinking and informed exchange, or any other relationship that embraces the social and the democratic values that support it. Freedom has become an exercise in self-development rather than social responsibility (Giroux 2015, 156).

Selfie culture weighs heavily in this conversation and, as Giroux acknowledges, while the obsession with self-imaging may not necessarily lead to the relinquishing of important private information online, it does speak to “the necessity to make the self into an object of public concern” (Giroux 2015, 156).

Minoritarian Uses and Positive Views of Social Media

The notion of *transforming the self into an object of public concern* is central to this discussion because while many cultural commentators see this phenomenon as a troubling cultural turn away from privacy as a fundamental right, for underrepresented groups, doing so can be an effective strategy for resistance. The online representational strategies of marginalized groups have often contested the dominant culture’s tendency toward devaluing, misrepresentation, and erasure. Constituencies traditionally ignored by major media-based industries tend to productively embrace participatory networks and interactive platforms as an oppositional tool. One of the more generative aspects of self-imaging online is its engagement with new forms of image making in the twenty-first century that utilize (and often weaponize) individuated, participatory and interactive practices as a powerful means for social engagement. These individuals are all too aware of the implicit identity politics of representation and harness its ideological potential in their embrace of the often-fraught and misinterpreted act of online self-imaging. (For a vibrant example of an artist utilizing self-imaging to reimagine the visual and polemical dimensions of self-imaging, see Lehner 2019).³

When giving public lectures on the topic of online self-imaging, I often encounter resistance to the idea that, for many underrepresented and maligned constituencies, selfies hold the potential for political engagement. The argument against this notion suggests that because this cultural activity occurs via corporate tools and utilizes technologies engendered by multinational corporations, there is no possibility for substantive resistance. This perspective has only intensified as corporations have attempted to harness and monetize the power of self-imaging (and the organic personalities that have emerged online) to extend the reach of their products. The result was the rise of the Influencer. In particular many young women who generated significant followings on Instagram have been enlisted by a range of companies to function as paid ambassadors, their bodies now functioning as human billboards. In previous articles, I have troubled this reading because there is tendency to always view women and ethnic minorities as inherently victimized, and therefore incapable of wielding technology in innovative and oppositional ways.

The links being established among gender, selfie-taking, and mental health exemplify the ways that women’s uses of new technologies are being characterized as a social scourge. In contrast, the white supremacist, alt-right, and other extremist and racist groups rising to visibility in the United States and Europe over the past decade have become extremely adept at wielding Internet-based technologies and social media platforms to colonize and spread hateful propaganda and fake news as a means to poison the public debate. Even far right politicians, pundits, and cultural commentators have become extremely adept at embracing social media tactics, from memes, hashtags, Twitter posts, and various forms of weaponized visual culture, to push their toxic agendas. These forms of online participation are taken seriously and are often legitimated in the political, cultural, and technological

conversation. Scholar Jessie Daniels has been critical of white liberal cultural commentators who largely fail to recognize the stakes of online, tech-based racism:

[T]he view that circulates in popular understandings of the alt-right and of tech culture by mostly White liberal writers, scholars, and journalists is one in which racism is a “bug” rather than a “feature” of the system. They report with alarm that there’s racism on the Internet (or, in the last election), as if this is a revelation, or they “journey” into the heart of the racist right, as if it isn’t everywhere in plain sight. Or, they write with a kind of shock mixed with reassurance that alt-right proponents live next door, have gone to college, gotten a proper haircut, look like a hipster, or, sometimes, put on a suit and tie. Our understanding of the algorithmic rise of the alt-right must do better than these quick, hot takes.

If we’re to stop the next Charlottesville or the next Emanuel AME Church massacre, we have to recognize that the algorithms of search engines and social media platforms facilitated these hate crimes. To grasp the 21st century world around us involves parsing different inflections of contemporary racism: the overt and ideologically committed White nationalists co-mingle with the tech industry, run by boy-kings steeped in cyberlibertarian notions of freedom, racelessness, and an ethos in which the only evil is restricting the flow of information on the internet (and, thereby, their profits) (Daniels 2018).

Beyond Daniels’ point, the Internet has also become fertile ground for the political aesthetics of women, broadly defined, who are fully aware that their bodies are a site of political struggle. Young women in our current moment, especially those of color, tend to recuperate a politics of the body to challenge a range of inequities and oppressions. A failure, or perhaps refusal, to see how female self-imaging online (in its myriad forms and intentions) intervenes in sexist norms, is to turn one’s back on various resistances: social, political, cultural, medical, economic and technological. Taiwanese-American photographer Vivian Fu received notoriety for her Internet-based blogging on the social media sites Tumblr and Instagram (see Figures 31.1–31.3). Fu, like many young women in their teens and early twenties, was active on social media, and often engaged in conversations related to themes ranging from body image, sexuality, eating disorders, to pornography, among many others. But what is notable about this phenomenon is that self-imaging emerged as a distinctly visual polemical device that wasn’t simply about vanity but was also a means for



FIGURE 31.1 Vivian Fu, *Self Portrait In Airplane Bathroom, Somewhere Over the Pacific Ocean*, October 2012. Posted on Tumblr © Vivian Fu.



FIGURE 31.2 Vivian Fu, *Self Portrait In Bathroom, Inner Richmond*, April 2013. Posted on Tumblr © Vivian Fu.



FIGURE 31.3 Vivian Fu, *Self Portrait in Bathroom, Mission*, August 2013. Posted on Tumblr © Vivian Fu.

resisting the cultural devaluing, trivializing and erasure of women, especially those who are minoritized. Fu was particularly adept at utilizing self-imaging to challenge entrenched and pernicious stereotypes about Asian women. Her images captured the interests of a diversity of women internationally who were contending with similar issues. This emergent feminism, however, has often been either mischaracterized, trivialized, or simply maligned as an expression of online narcissism and a symptom of personality disorders.

Online feminism and activism concerned with women's issues, as with the #MeToo movement and what has been termed hashtag feminism, have been delegitimated and at times excoriated by the mainstream press. Online forms of feminism have been linked to celebrity and particularly famous women in the worlds of entertainment who have made bold proclamations in support of feminist issues. In fact, major celebrities such as Beyoncé and Miley Cyrus are self-proclaimed feminists and have integrated feminist mantras into their music and live performances. The concern is that these expressions are viewed as

trends that are more invested in personal commitments and the cult of personality, as opposed to a sense of collective action. According to feminist cultural critic Susan Faludi:

[T]he new individualist style of feminism so often cast itself as an alternative instead of as an aid to the old-fashioned communal activism ... Tufts University exit polls found that only 20 percent of millennial women disagreed with the statement that feminism “is about personal choice, not politics ...”

There’s a bigger problem here. Celebrity feminism is based on the idea that a celebrity can instigate change by representing a cause. Which so often reduces the cause to a persona. ... You can establish your persona by embracing a cause. Virtue becomes a vanity. No longer are you doing something; you’re being something. And in our social-media age, anyone with a YouTube channel or a TikTok account can give it a try (Faludi 2022).

Faludi’s critique captures an anxiety that a vital movement will be misinterpreted, perverted, and ultimately neutralized by well-intentioned, if misguided, celebrities. But, putting some pressure on Faludi’s point—her suggestion that online culture has ushered in what could best be described as a very superficial form of pseudo-feminist, narcissistic individualism, which masquerades as social engagement—we might argue that she is misinterpreting the potential unwitting consequences of their actions. The idea here is that these women—both the celebrities and the young women who admire them—are politically naïve and ultimately ignorant about feminism. In my previous writing about online self-imaging, I described efforts to link selfie-taking with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (N.P.D.), a tendency that appears to mirror other efforts to characterize particular types of female-driven online engagement as troubling at best, if not outright pernicious, at worst (Murray 2020). #MeToo was not a perfect movement, but it did bring substantial attention to abuses occurring silently and behind the closed doors of powerful industries with little to no public accountability. The movement was arguably a crucial facet of a broader struggle, despite efforts to view it as ultimately a failure.

I have written extensively about the popular cultural conversation dedicated to the selfie phenomenon, paying particular attention to the gendered dimension of the discourse. There continues to be an effort to skew perception of selfie-takers toward a female archetype (young girls and women), while simultaneously suturing the practice of self-imaging to a discussion of mental health. (For additional writing on the links among selfies, gender, and mental health, see Murray 2015, 2020, 2022).

This in itself is misogynistic—falling in line with the age-old conflation of femaleness and emotional excessiveness or madness. In contrast to these tendencies, my interest in selfies is not rooted in their perceived importance, but rather the psychodynamics of self-imaging as personal reflection and as a rhetorical device.

There are arguably two predominating critical strains in the discourse on selfies: one that views it as a symptom of a society increasingly controlled by corporate consumerism and surveillance, and the other as a puerile act that is trivial, or at the very least lacks cultural importance. What differentiates the selfie from the traditional photographic self-portrait is its social and technological dimension. Selfies are a visual language that sends various visual cues around a range of issues and cultural meanings. The selfie, as I explore in my work, enables a more rigorous and multidisciplinary engagement with the psychology of looking than was possible before the advent of social media. Within this analysis, what has emerged as significant and meaningful is the negative response to online self-imaging, a reaction primarily of scorn and embarrassment by some viewers who perceive selfies to be merely whimsical and lacking substance. There is a reticence in this reaction—a reluctance to peer upon the perceived self-obsession of other individuals. And this reticence turns to scorn and at times even revulsion. (As an aside, I would stress that this relates in art discourse, especially in the twentieth century,

to anxieties around the politics of recognition and the efforts of socially defined minorities to gain visibility and value in the arts. Perhaps partly due to the ubiquity of social media visualizations of minoritarian subjects as well as to the successes of various forms of the rights movements, this has begun to change somewhat, and there has been a concerted effort to acknowledge underrepresented artists and arts professionals in recent years.)

Visual Culture Approaches to Self-Imaging on Social Media Platforms

As previously mentioned, there has not been a very robust or enthusiastic critical embrace of the selfie in contemporary art discourse. There is, on the one hand, a significant amount of serious scholarship being done on the subject of digital self-portraiture (primarily in the social sciences, and communications) but, on the other hand, as noted earlier, most of it is *not* engaged with the visual. While there is a need for scholarship that is innovative, knowledgeable, and insightful about online self-imaging as a social, economic, and technological phenomenon, there is a paucity of research that is engaged with digital self-portraiture *as* representation. Scholars Edgar Gómez and Ellen Thornham make an argument against an over-fixation on the individual, suggesting that placing undue attention on self-representation is to distract away from more profound social effects:

We argue that contemporary understandings of selfies either in relation to a “documenting of the self” or as a neoliberal (narcissistic) identity affirmation are inherently problematic. Instead, we argue that selfies should be understood as a wider social, cultural, and media phenomenon that understands the selfie as far more than a representational image. This, in turn, necessarily redirects us away from the object “itself,” and in so doing seeks to understand selfies as a socio-technical phenomenon that momentarily and tentatively holds together a number of different elements of mediated digital communication (Gómez and Thornham 2015).

Gómez and Thornham’s position is a widely held one across the spectrum of social sciences research—even while the selfie, as a highly personalized representational act, speaks directly to discourses around the recognition of identity. The tendency in this kind of social sciences scholarship to focus on the “socio-technical” aspects of the selfie while ignoring the selfie-taker is a type of effacement that negates the implicit politics of our bodies as political and ideological subjects.

As of yet, I have not turned to art discourse to illuminate the complexities of online self-imaging. In fact, I have been largely critical of such a move, primarily because, as noted already, visual arts discourses and institutions have traditionally been rather conservative and have frankly misinterpreted or marginalized representational practices concerned with identity. The continued tendency in social sciences discourse to elide subjectivity and the complexities of identity when engaging with online self-imaging has, however, reignited my interest in revisiting some debates around identity politics and the visual arts in the late 1990s to early 2000s. Many scholars in the arts have contested the problematic erasure and segregation of art along the lines of gender, race, sexuality, and nationality, yet there remains a need, as Amelia Jones has argued, to “account for identification *in acknowledging how we interpret and give value to art or visual culture*” (Jones 2012a, 1). And the 2006 article “Uneasy Bedfellows: Canonical Art Theory and the Politics of Identity,” co-authored by myself and Soraya Murray, directly challenged some of the dominant ideas in art discourse—in particular those authors who expressed consternation and hostility toward the rising legitimacy of identity politics in both the practice and display of contemporary art. The journal *October* played a significant role in these efforts to dismantle this paradigm-shifting

turn. Engaging critically with the writings of Hal Foster, a key member of the journal's leadership, "Uneasy Bedfellows" endeavored to locate and deconstruct theoretical efforts designed to methodically discredit and delegitimize identity-based art practices. At the time, we saw the rise of visual studies or visual culture studies—which led to a series of contentious discussions about the importance of preserving time-tested standards and competencies, in a crucial moment when the discipline of art history was rapidly becoming more diverse in its object of study and in the identities of its practitioners:

If the labor of global capitalism is enacted upon the bodies of socially defined minorities, how might the visual image of that same subjectivity hold up as a commodity? Judging by the success of postcolonial and minority artists in recent years, one must assume that it holds up extremely well. However, this relatively new artistic producer poses difficult questions related to capitalism, visual art, and authorship. These questions challenge the traditional ways of thinking about how art and artists function, especially considering our media-saturated consumer culture (Murray and Murray 2006).

The aforementioned quotation, which spoke to a shift in art discourse toward a greater emphasis on the global—as opposed to the Eurocentric, as well as the productions of under-represented and minoritized artists—is apropos to current discussions concerned with online self-imaging in that there has been a diversification of representations circulating online, due to a wide embrace of Internet technologies on a global scale and, in fact, to their broad availability to anyone with a mobile phone. What we see in the online era is the rise of a new avant-garde that has self-consciously embraced global capitalism and new technologies as a means to garner recognition via new modes of visual representation. While, as I have noted, the tendency is either to celebrate these new modes uncritically or to view these constituencies as essentially victims of capitalism, as operating under the control of major corporations, while only symbolically wielding an oppositional agency, clearly a more complex situation is at play in terms of structures of power and visibility.

Legacies of Feminism and Self-Imaging

One of the more intriguing phenomena of the selfie age is the broadening of interest in photography and an embrace of diaristic self-imaging practices that have been inspired by well-known American artists from the 1970s and following such as Larry Clark, Cindy Sherman, and Nan Goldin. Goldin's photography has emerged as one of the most influential for young female photographers and influencers on social media. In 2014, *The Guardian* writer Sean O'Hagan aptly articulated the sweeping impact of Goldin on younger generations of Internet savvy image-producers:

One only has to teach a class of undergraduate photography students to realize [Goldin's] ... influence. Her ideas infuse all new work that deals with close family members, friends or ideas of community. She gave legitimacy to an approach that has crudely been adopted and understood as "snapshot style" or "diaristic." I would go as far as to say her work has come to represent an entire style. In short, we are now living to a degree in a world that Nan Goldin created long before the digital camera and Instagram made it ubiquitous: a self-absorbed, often revelatory world where the everyday and the exotic exist in uneasy cohabitation. "I can't be held responsible for all that has happened since," she says when I bring this up, her eyes flashing and her enervated east-coast drawl undercut with just a hint of anger. "Most of that stuff is so easy and lacking in any kind of emotional depth or context. Nowadays, people forget how radical my work was when it first appeared. Nobody else was doing what I did" (O'Hagan 2014).

One of the ironies of this resurgence of interest in both Goldin's and Sherman's work is that both women had struggled for recognition in a male-dominated art world and, in the case of Sherman, there was a concerted effort among art historians and curators to delegitimize the feminist concerns in her photographic practice, while tending to elevate its sophisticated engagement with formalism and materiality. Sherman emerged as central to contentious debates in the early to mid-1990s concerned with what was characterized at the time as the *problem* of identity politics in the arts. Sherman is indeed an apt antecedent, as well as a fitting inspiration for the selfie generation, because she centers herself as the subject of representation in works that are unabashed in their very pointed investigations into a history of female representation. In fact, Sherman's deep investment in masquerade and self-fashioning emerged as prophetic and a precursor to the forms of visual self-mythologizing so commonly embraced as a representational practice online.

In his well-known 1996 essay "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic*," published in *October*, Hal Foster argues that in contemporary art and theory there has been a "shift in conception of the real: *from the real understood as an effect of representation to the real understood as an event of trauma*" (Foster 1996a, 106). Foster's query is critically engaged with the theory of the gaze in Jacques Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, but it is the feminist notion of the male gaze that Foster singles out as a deviation from Lacan's initial formulation. It is generative to detach Lacan's theory of the gaze from identity-based conceptions of the gaze that would emerge and ultimately dominate our understanding of its meaning. As Foster illuminates, it is true that in Lacan's articulation the gaze is indeed violent—yet in Foster's theorization, the violence is nonspecific, only the result of "picture-making and viewing, where we can manipulate and moderate the gaze" (Foster 1996a, 109). Foster's fidelity to a kind of literal return to Lacan's formulation of the gaze has the intent of questioning a core theorization in the identity-based conceptual approaches of feminist artists such as Sherman. (For additional writing that contends with the complexities of Sherman's engagement with female representation, see Mulvey 1996). For Foster, the turn toward identity is a fraudulent and deeply troubling tendency toward privileging the concern of a specific identity group at the expense of others:

This idealization of otherness tends to follow a temporal line in which one group is privileged as the new subject of history, only to be displaced by another, a chronology that may collapse not only different differences (social, ethnic, sexual, and so on) but also different positions within each difference (Foster 1996b, 205).

Foster's misgivings aptly articulated widely held beliefs in the 1990s among powerful art historians about the perils of identity politics and visual art, but he was also concerned that his restrictive stance would be taken as an expression of intolerance:

There are dangers with this siting of truth as well, such as the restriction of our political imagination to two camps, the abjector and the abjected, and the assumption that in order not to be counted among sexists and racists, one must become the phobic object of such subjects (Foster 1996a, 27).

This quotation from Foster tends to over-simplify or flatten the complexities of identity-based works, like those of Sherman; it also represents a disavowal of the artist's attempts at visual recognition and especially the manner with which it foregrounds regimes of visual representation rooted in a specifically male gaze. There is no denying the impact of Sherman on the visually oppositional strategies of women in the Internet and social media age, though American artist Lynda Benglis (b. 1941) has provided an iconic example. When teaching contemporary art of the 1970s, I always expose students to Benglis's incendiary ad that appeared in *Artforum* magazine in 1974. The now notorious image depicted the artist nude and posed in a manner

satirically reminiscent of an erotic pinup, while holding a large latex dildo and wearing only a pair of sunglasses. Art historian Richard Meyer brilliantly described the work's force:

The artist described her spread at the time as the “ultimate mockery of the pinup and the macho,” and it's not hard to see what she meant. She presents the dildo less as an object to be inserted into her body than as an extension of it—a massive if patently artificial erection. ...

The publication of the ad thirty years ago this month famously provoked a furor within the art world, polarizing critics, including feminist ones, and outraging five of the six associate editors of *Artforum*, two of whom (both women) resigned in the extended aftermath of the episode. In a letter published in the December 1974 issue, the five editors denounced Benglis's ad as “an object of extreme vulgarity,” which “brutaliz[ed]” both themselves and their readers (Meyer 2004).

Benglis's ad is often regarded as a direct commentary on both the objectification of women artists, and the male-dominated artworld that marginalized and limited the opportunities of women. As *New York Times* critic Roberta Smith recounts, it led to its fair share of controversy, as it was widely considered pornography, and therefore obscene and inappropriate, noting that there was a “historic dust-up that ensued when this photograph appeared. ... Ms. Benglis called the image a ‘centerfold’ and considered it a work of art; others called it an ad, since Paula Cooper, Ms. Benglis's dealer at the time, made arrangements for its placement; still others said it was pornography and unsuitable for an art magazine” (Smith 2009). Per Smith's description, the work flouted the boundaries between art, pornography, and advertisement.

It makes sense, then, that since the rise of social media, when presenting this work (and the controversies it engendered) to art history students, it tends to be compared to young women's self-imaging strategies online. Both Benglis and Sherman used photography to capture and inspire a kind of claimed and performed agency that resonates with Internet forms of visual activism. These modes of performative self-portraiture had a significant oppositional impact on our understanding of visibility and identity, yet they also seem to mobilize a spirit of resistance that resonates with millennial women. In fact, in the past ten years there has been a resurgence of female artistic practices engaged with menstrual blood, vaginal imagery, and body hair as activist gestures. (For reading on the emergent trend in controversial feminist body art, see Cochrane 2009; Martinčič 2016). This recent turn toward a kind of feminist abjection emerges most commonly in the work of young photographers concerned with resisting unhealthy beauty standards, connecting back to strategies among feminist artists in the 1970s. The term “cunt art” was used in that decade to characterize feminist art practices that made references to female reproduction and genitalia (Jones 2012b, 178). Feminist artists such as, Judy Chicago, Carolee Schneemann, Mira Schor, and others are well-known for their investigation of this kind of female imagery in the 1970s through the 1990s, and there appears to be a return to a similar ethos among young women today. Photographers Sandy Kim and Petra Collins have become notorious in social media circles for their embrace of female imagery, which is meant to transform the act of self-imaging into a tool of resistance and to wield the body as a polemical tool to confront a range of societal inequities faced by women. In many ways, these gestures feel petulant and bound up in hipster and fashion trends, but they are still reflective of a return toward a more confrontational feminism. This shift in female representation is clearly reminiscent of what Laura Mulvey termed “a new politics of the body” that emerged in the early 1970s. As Mulvey recounts: “[i]n the early seventies, the women's movement claimed the female body as a site for political struggle, mobilizing around abortion rights, above all, but with other ancillary issues spiraling out into agitation over medical marginalization and sexuality itself as a source of women's oppression” (Mulvey 2006a, 138–139).

The political aesthetics that Mulvey speaks of continue to have resonance, albeit reflected in the contemporaneous issues that impact women's experiences today. However, as I write these

words, it was announced that the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which will almost eliminate the constitutional right to an abortion across the United States. Considering the violence of this ruling and the disastrous repercussions it is sure to engender, there will likely be an even more fervent wave of activism that mobilizes the female body as a means of liberation and recuperation. There has already been a collapsing of aesthetic and political engagement between the legacies of second wave feminism (which arose in the 1960s) and the so-called “selfie generation,” in terms of their representational tactics, yet there has been very little scholarly interest within art history and visual culture in addressing this historical shift. The histories of feminist representational politics of the 1970s through the identity debates of the 1980s and 1990s are as relevant and urgent as ever. And, as previously argued, there is a need to revisit not just that history of artistic, activist, and intellectual engagement of the period but also the theorizations aimed at methodically discrediting the representational activism of women artists.

These dismissals of women’s use of social media bring forth a key question: Why is it so hard to look the other in the eye? This refusal to look more closely (especially at images of the “other,” someone different from oneself) is a vexation I believe impacts a range of cultural commentators and scholars, especially within the social sciences where critical discussions of social media habits are most prevalent. Soraya Murray has intervened in the problem of barriers to essentially *seeing* the image-maker/subject by showing how selfies are being used by young women to “crack open temporary new publics” and make space for themselves as sophisticated agents within a hypercapitalistic language of self-branding with an awareness of previous radical artistic precedents for mobilizing the personal as political (Murray 2022). Looking at the self-imaging work of contemporary artists Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin, Laurel Nakadate, and Nikki S. Lee, Murray shows how female bloggers such as Rupī Kaur, Molly Soda, and Arvida Byström similarly utilize everyday performances of the self in ways that enhance conversations about recognition borne out of 1970s feminist representational practices. “The notion of whether change is possible from within mainstream media culture—or from within a social media platform—can certainly be contested,” Murray writes:

but their intervention indicates self-awareness of what is at stake in their work. But by understanding these kinds of interventions as records of intentional self-imaging, of choices self-consciously made, the “selfie” can be understood as an extension of a long history of women mobilizing their own self-images in the service of creating space for themselves in the world (Murray 2022, 162).

With this argument, Murray pushes against the notion that that technology in the hands of the other can only be an expression of consumerist victimhood engendered by hegemonic corporations such as Meta (the owner of Facebook and Instagram), intent on stripping us of our fundamental rights.

While certainly these mobilizations of the selfie evince far more than mere nostalgia for a previous era, the struggle for equity and visually based use of the personal to ensure recognition does harken back to the identity debates of the 1990s. “In awareness of context, and with purpose,” Murray ultimately argues, selfies as vernacular images invoke an ongoing conversation, one for which the methods of art history and visual culture may provide great insight—if only we would look the other in the eye, and see (Murray 2022, 162).

Notes

- 1 Jones unpacks how contemporary artists have utilized emergent technologies of representation to explore shifting modes of subjectivity.
- 2 Marantz explores, then, evolution from the exuberant and hopeful cultural attitudes about a handful of fast-growing social networks—Myspace, Twitter, Reddit, and Facebook—to an

increasing skepticism around the perils and abuses of new and emergent technologies. Marantz further argues that technological optimism has given way to an increasing awareness that social media in particular has empowered bigots, hucksters, propagandists, and conspiracy theorists.

- 3 Lehner argues that the Alok Vai-Menon, a gender non-conforming transfeminine artist of color, weaponizes online self-imaging, and in particular mobilizes the “selfie” as an avant-garde form of visual representation to challenge conventional notions of subjectivity.

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ALGORITHM

Algorithms in Global Art and Visual Culture

Gary Kafer and Tyler Quick

In the twenty-first century, algorithms have become increasingly incorporated into global politics, media, culture, and society, including contemporary art. Not only have we seen an increase in artistic practices that utilize algorithmic technologies we have also witnessed drastic changes within the production of art more broadly in response to the role that computation plays within the global economy and Internet culture. Furthermore, the capacity of algorithms that are purported to have artificial intelligence has renewed anxieties surrounding the nature of creativity and the role of labor in the arts. As in ages past, the emergence of this new medium has introduced questions of power and ideology that both transform visual culture and impact the way we experience art. In this chapter, we take a cursory glance at these issues to better understand how the production, distribution, and reception of art has transformed in the age of the algorithm.

In its common use today, the term “algorithm” typically refers to a set of finite mathematical rules to be followed as part of a problem-solving process, often performed by a computer. However, the concept of the algorithm is not new, extending from antiquity through the medieval periods. In ancient Babylonia, Egypt, India, and Greece, algorithmic procedures were used for a variety of purposes, including deriving prime numbers or breaking code. Indeed, the term itself is derived from the surname of the ninth-century Persian mathematician Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī whose texts describe many of the fundamental methods and procedures of algebra. What is key here is how, for much of its history, the algorithmic was closely entwined with the arithmetic, referring to processes of calculation using a decimal number system (Striphas 2015). It was not until the second quarter of the twentieth century with the introduction of digital computing that our contemporary framework for algorithms emerged. From the 1960s through the 2000s, computer scientists defined algorithms as abstract methods of computing that turn a designated input into a desired output based on a specified series of discrete, repeatable, and automated mathematical processes (Sandvig 2016). And yet, beyond their technical capacities, what has made algorithms so significant in our contemporary moment is how they have transformed a wide range of global cultural, political, and social spheres of activity. Algorithms do many things: they can terminate insurance benefits, sentence someone to prison, allocate resources across cities, trade stocks, recommend movies, and launch drone

strikes. Thus, the term algorithmic invokes much more than a discrete set of procedures within a computational program, instead suggesting how mathematical procedures have become inserted into human knowledge and social experience across global information systems. In this sense, algorithms have also become the site of culture insofar as they modulate human experiences and construct normative ways of making meaning by correlating new relations among data, optimizing outputs, and automating decision-making.

In this chapter, we emphasize the relationship between contemporary art and a global algorithmic culture. In doing so, our aim is to move beyond a techno-determinist framework of the algorithm and its relation to art practice. While the presence of certain kinds of digital, networked, and computational technologies (like machine learning and artificial intelligence, or AI) to produce art are no doubt important to consider, they do not by themselves account for the myriad ways that algorithms have transformed visual culture. To be sure, algorithms are not only being used to create new works of art, but also to identify markets for art consumption, shape patterns of attention and labor, and distribute resources across global supply networks. In what follows, we first review a range of debates demonstrating how algorithms have facilitated a range of political, social, and economic transformations during the early twenty-first century, highlighting specifically how computational technologies transform visual culture and remediate power. In the following two sections, we consider various ways in which contemporary artists interrogate algorithmic culture, and finally how algorithmic culture has impacted under what conditions art is made, sold, and distributed.

Algorithmic Visual Culture

Advancements in computational media in the twenty-first century have called into question the rhetoric with which algorithms are framed as fixed, finite, and procedural recipes for executing an output or solving a problem. Algorithmic media—including machine learning, neural networks, and artificial intelligence—are characterized by complex and multilayered networks of flexible parameters, weightings, and decision thresholds, all of which aim to produce the most optimal output. As Louise Amoore explains, the kind of algorithms “that are so categorically redefining our lives are characterized less by the series of steps in a calculation than by the relations among functions” (Amoore 2020, 11). Key here is a new kind of agency attributed to algorithms. As what Luciana Parisi has called “performing entities,” algorithms select, transform, and produce relations among data rather than simply processing a given input into an output (Parisi 2013). Machine learning, for example, is not so much concerned with uncovering some underlying truth or automating a stable output as it is with fabricating associations among data through a set of modifiable functions and probabilistic models (Mackenzie 2017). Machine learning systems such as support vector machines and decision trees generate predictive and classificatory statements by inferring rules from historical data sets and then applying those rules to new data. The goal of machine learning thus is never simply to decide what is true or false, but rather to optimize an outcome and minimize misclassifications by drawing correlations among often partial and incomplete data sets.

Insofar as algorithms have assumed a new kind of agency in the development of novel computational technologies, they have increasingly come to mediate our lived social realities. As “assemblages” (Ananny 2016, 94), “sociotechnical ensembles” (Gillespie 2016, 22), and “intricate, dynamic arrangements of people and code” (Seaver 2019, 419) algorithms are never simply isolated computational programs, but are instead networks of information systems that are built to be implemented in real-world contexts, performing diverse operations across various spheres of social, cultural, and political activity. In each case, algorithms insert procedural models into knowledge systems and human experience in what Ted Striphas calls “algorithmic culture,” wherein culture itself is now “the positive remainder resulting from

specific information tasks” (Striphas 2015, 406). What marks the *algorithmic* in our algorithmic culture thus is a commitment to computational processes as institutionally situated mechanisms that govern decision-making within pre-established political systems concerned with objectivity, automation, and rationalization. As Tarleton Gillespie clarifies, “what makes something algorithmic is that it is produced by or related to an information system committed (both functionally and ideologically) to the computational generation of knowledge or decisions” (Gillespie 2016, 25–26). Search engines, recommendation systems, high-frequency stock market trading, credit score rankings, and social media platforms all mobilize algorithmic methods in order to filter information, infer correlations, and execute decisions based on the kinds of relationships observed in the data. In turn, users of these big data programs integrate the outputs of algorithmic processes into their daily practices to make sense of the world around them, compile knowledge, and understand themselves as part of various publics. At work then in the intersection of algorithms and cultural practices is what Gillespie calls a “recursive loop” between human and machinic forms of experience and knowledge production, where algorithms by default inform the very information practices that humans rely upon in order to participate in public life (Gillespie 2014, 183).

While algorithms have emerged as influential political actors in contemporary society, they have also led to massive transformations in human visual culture. As William Uricchio suggests, “over the past decade or so we have had increased access to new ways of representing and seeing the world, ways dependent on algorithmic interventions between the viewing subject and the object viewed” (Uricchio 2011, 25). If, as Walter Benjamin famously argued, photographic technology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries stripped objects of their aura—their unique presence in space and time—and made them available for distribution as images, algorithms don’t simply reproduce the world in images (Benjamin 1968). Rather, they use images to actively reconstruct the world. In the words of multimedia artist Trevor Paglen, “We no longer look at images—images look at us. They no longer simply represent things, but actively intervene in everyday life” (Paglen 2016). Through granular and invasive data mining practices and complex layers of machine learning and artificial intelligence, algorithms compose images from vast archives of information, often without any immediate reference to how things appear to the human eye. Beyond the photoshopped selfies and deepfakes that appear on our screens, there exists what Paglen calls an “invisible world of machine-machine visual culture” saturated with digital images that silently impact social life. Such images are “machine-readable”—that is, they are produced by and for machines only, rather than for humans (Paglen 2016). Such images must be understood less as visual representations of the world and more so as mathematical abstractions of metadata. For a computer vision system, a face is not simply a face, but a gradient of values that map onto specific features that have been selected to stand-in for face.

Importantly, algorithmic images exceed a mere interest in a faithful recording of reality. Rather, they are operational: they aid in identifying people, constructing patterns of consumer habits, influencing elections, and even enacting violence as in the case of drone warfare. What is significant is how algorithmic visual culture facilitates the automation of vision as well as of the exercise of power. Central here is the relationship of algorithms to issues of control, discrimination, and bias. Allegedly neutral and objective computational technologies, algorithms nonetheless operate as powerful surveillant tools for what David Lyon terms “social sorting” that aim to classify and govern people, representations, and information (Lyon 2003). At stake is how algorithms produce and reinforce mediated identities shaped by forms of social difference, including race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality. Indeed, recent scholarship in Critical Data Studies has shown how algorithmic logics encode racist tendencies and extend capitalist and colonial frameworks of power and inequity (see e.g. Benjamin 2019; Eubanks 2017; Noble 2018; O’Neil 2016). Wendy Chun, for example, demonstrates how concepts like homophily, correlation, and clustering in network science are grounded in legacies of segregation and eugenics from a pre-digital era (Chun

2021). Across systems such as welfare distribution and economic forecasting, as well as global infrastructures of drone warfare, biometric surveillance, and labor automation, algorithms consolidate data into correlative patterns that group populations and target individuals based on their similarity according to predefined categories of social difference. Ultimately, such methods of population-based data classification disproportionately affect those most marginalized and oppressed in our society, including people of color, women, migrants, the disabled, sexual and religious minorities, socialists and other leftists, and the working class.

What is crucial about such forms of data discrimination is how algorithms presume a non-representational relation between data and identity. One's "algorithmic identity" is less a record of one's behavior than it is an approximation of categorical membership based on how newly captured data fits into pre-existing models (Cheney-Lippold 2017, 27). Data mining practices don't so much discover one's identity as much as they construct and define the ways in which it takes on significance and value within established political, social, and cultural systems. For example, predictive policing software claims to be able to anticipate where crime will occur within a given urban environment. However, rather than focus on individual behaviors, such software instead often uses proxies such as zip code, income, and housing values to determine what neighborhoods are susceptible to crime. While the use of such proxies is meant to elide accusations of racism in big data policing, the issue is that they inevitably reproduce pre-existing cultural biases and patterns of exclusion laden in the dataset. To be identified as a criminal in predictive policing software is to be assigned to a particular cluster of data points based on statistical correlations supported by historical data sets that have long assumed a correlation between crime and race. What programs like predictive policing thus demonstrate is how algorithmic prediction is less a matter of uncovering hidden identities or even forecasting the unknown than it is about constructing the future to align with the current status quo. It is precisely this difference that the artists in the following section examine in their investigations of contemporary algorithmic culture.

Contemporary Algorithmic Art

Just as the algorithm predates its contemporary digital form, algorithmic art is not unique to the twenty-first century. Across the latter half of the twentieth century, artists experimented with digital and computational systems to produce novel visual forms and procedures for artmaking. This is especially the case for a select group of white men from the United States and East Asian men who had professional training and access to computers within research and military institutions prior to the introduction of personal computing. In the 1960s, the so-called first generation of digital artists—including, Georg Nees, Manfred Mohr, and Frieder Nake, as well as engineers at Bell Telephone Laboratories like A. Michael Noll—crafted programs for producing computer-generated images previously unavailable to other kinds of media. A decade later, the terms "computer art" and "generative art" were being applied to a whole range of art practices involving autonomous information processing technologies. In the mid-1990s, Roman Verostko, Jean Pierre Hébert, and Ken Musgrave coined the term "algorist" to describe artists who construct their own form-generating algorithms to produce images.¹ Many of this group's early work included plotted drawings, such as Hébert's *Spirale calme* (1988), which were created by computer programs that would guide a mechanical arm with a pen attached to it over a sheet of paper. To be sure, what counts as algorithmic art need not be tied to digital processes. Conceptual artists such as Sol Lewitt, experimental composers like John Cage, and structuralist filmmakers like Peter Kubelka all explored varying kinds of automated, proceduralized, and predetermined formal processes to assemble materials into a final composition.

In what follows, we take a broad, non-comprehensive survey of contemporary algorithmic artists. However, in doing so, we stress two major points. First, while many

contemporary artists continue to invest in algorithms as procedural forms of artmaking, far more notable is how they interrogate algorithmic visual culture and its disparate effects, including how algorithms construct mediated identities, reinforce categories of social difference, and structure systems of inequity. Thus, while direct engagement with media forms such as machine learning and AI may vary, what is consistent is an interest in how algorithms function as technologies of power that support broader machineries of capital, colonial, and imperial domination. To address such issues, the following survey of artists is divided into four key themes: optimization, classification, prediction, and resistance.

Second, much like the history of new media and computer art from the second half of the twentieth century, the field of contemporary algorithmic art is saturated with power differentials that enable certain kinds of artists, often from the Global North, to produce work that gains visibility in various art markets and academic circles. In many ways, such differentials reflect the demographic breakdown of technology industries, especially those in Silicon Valley, that predominately hire white men, and to a lesser extent men from East Asian backgrounds, with university training in computer science. And yet, this is not to suggest that the contemporary field of algorithmic art is without diverse experiences or perspectives. Indeed, just as women artists were always central to the development of new media art from the beginning of the 1960s, in the twenty-first century more and more women, queer, trans, and BIPOC artists have not only gained access to various technical systems but have also found ways to intervene in dominant algorithmic cultures to imagine new ways for computational technologies to function (see Brodsky 2021; Russell 2020). In what follows, we highlight a range of artists who examine and critique contemporary algorithmic culture from these kinds of sociopolitical positions. And yet, at the same time, many of these artists are located in the United States, which reflects more broadly the US-centrism to analyses of algorithmic culture. By negotiating these tendencies and limitations, we aim to show how discussions of contemporary algorithmic art must likewise confront the power differentials that shape who is able to make such work, as well as how such work speaks to and about various publics.

Among the many problems that artists examine in our contemporary algorithmic culture is the interface between humans and machines. If algorithms have assumed a new kind of agency in our global visual culture, they have also redefined socialization and labor within increasingly datafied systems of optimization. Social media platforms, for example, not only determine through algorithms what kinds of information a user might see but also how users interact with one another, often with the goal of increasing revenue by enhancing online engagement and strengthening networks. In her digital and performance work, American artist Lauren McCarthy interrogates how AI has penetrated ordinary public and private human experiences by optimizing forms of affective labor. In *Social Turkers* (2013), McCarthy used the platform Amazon Mechanical Turk—an online crowdsourcing website launched by Amazon in 2005 that allows businesses to outsource labor to “crowdworkers” that perform discrete on-demand tasks—to hire remote workers to provide real-time feedback on how to best interact with dates she met on the online dating site OkCupid. In her more recent work *Someone* (2019), visitors to a New York gallery could assume the role of a home automation assistant by controlling the smart technologies installed in the homes of four participants over the course of two months. Across these works, labor that might be otherwise performed by AI is redirected to humans who aim to control and prime human behavior. While McCarthy envisions the ways that AI have attempted to optimize human behavior within ordinary modes of algorithmic living, others like Italian artist Elisa Giardina Papa consider how these very same systems extract human labor to optimize AI systems. In *The Cleaning of Emotional Data* (2020), Giardina Papa presents a three-channel video installation documenting her experience as a remote worker for North American companies that create datasets to aid AI algorithms in detecting emotion. Such tasks included, for example, annotating facial expressions with emotional metadata as well as recording her own face to use in animating three-dimensional avatars. By tracing hidden forms of labor within algorithmic culture, Giardina

Papa explores how human experience, perception, and affect is reconfigured as data within automated digital economies. At the same time, she gestures toward the broader global infrastructure of underpaid microworkers, often in the Global South, who are contracted to manually “clean” data—a process that involves an array of responsibilities to prepare information to train AI systems, including image labeling, text processing, and content moderation.

In addition to optimization, many contemporary artists address classification as another significant aspect of algorithmic culture, often gesturing to the limitations that underlie techniques of categorization within machine learning and AI systems. In *Cloud Face* (2012), for example, South Korean artist and engineer duo Shinseungback Kimyonghun exhibit photographs of clouds recognized by an AI program as human faces. Similarly, in *Cat or Human* (2013), they display images of human faces identified as cats by a cat face-detection algorithm and cat faces identified as humans by a human face-detection algorithm. While humorous, such works limit the often nefarious ways in which algorithms unwittingly misclassify objects, which can lead to serious injury across social and political life. In their online project *ImageNet Roulette* (2019), American artist Trevor Paglen and AI researcher Kate Crawford take up such issues to explore the myriad ways in which algorithms detect, sort, and classify humans within a rapidly evolving machinic visual culture. In this work, Crawford and Paglen delve into one of the most widely used training sets for machine learning called ImageNet, which contains millions of images scraped from the Internet and tagged by laborers through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform. Through custom software, they developed a website that allowed users to upload a photograph of a human face, which would then be classified using labels that structure the ImageNet database. While some photographs would yield fairly innocuous results, others were more malicious, revealing the racist, misogynist, sexist, and ableist stereotypes of a colonial past that continually inform contemporary algorithmic technologies. Ultimately, *ImageNet Roulette* not only explores new aesthetic configurations of the algorithmic image but also uses artistic methods to inform the public about the technological operations underlying algorithmic culture, as well as lead to changes in research behind AI and machine learning.

In addition to their pedagogical function, some artworks can also point more broadly to issues of state violence through techniques of (mis)classification. In *Level of Confidence* (2015), Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer trained a facial recognition camera upon a database of forty-three students from Ayotzinapa school in Iguala, Mexico that were abducted and disappeared in 2014 by local police and an organized crime syndicate. When confronted with the camera, visitors to the installation are matched with a photograph of one of the students, as well as presented with a level of confidence score indicating the accuracy of the algorithm’s output.

Taking issues of classification further, many other contemporary artists critique how algorithms purport to be able to predict futures based on prior patterns of data. This is especially the case with recent advancements in predictive policing software currently deployed by police departments in the United States, as well as in China, Denmark, Germany, India, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. In American artist Lynn Herschman Leeson’s installation *Shadow Stalker* (2019), for example, viewers are presented with a video exploring the history of the predictive policing program PredPol and are then asked to interact with a web portal that attempts to predict white-collar crime based on zip code using the same algorithms that typically target racial and ethnic communities and lower-income neighborhoods. Similarly, *White Collar Crime Risk Zones* (2017) by American artist Sam Levigne in collaboration with data scientist Brian Clifton and software engineer Francis Tseng parodies predictive policing software by using machine learning techniques to construct a predictive heat map of where financial crimes might occur (Figure 32.1). In the app-based work *1956/2056* (2019), the American artist known as American Artist takes a different approach to predictive policing, instead presenting users with an imagined visual experience of an AI tool that directs police officers to areas determined to be at high-risk for criminal activity. And yet, in the video, no crime ever appears, thus revealing the



FIGURE 32.1 *White Collar Crime Risk Zones*, 2017 by Sam Levigne, Brian Clifton, and Francis Tseng. *The New Inquiry Magazine*, Vol. 59: Abolish / <https://whitecollar.thenewinquiry.com/> / last accessed March 15, 2023.

fantasies of Black criminality that underpin such programs and their speculative—and damaging—visions of the future. In all these works, artists interrogate the anti-Black logics that subtend predictive policing software in order to gesture toward the broader racialization of visibility and speculation in contemporary machinic visual culture.

While many of the aforementioned artists explore the intricacies of algorithms and their social, cultural, and political implications, many others engage contemporary art practice as an opportunity to experiment with methods of collective organizing and social justice. In the United States, a range of artists over the past decade have explored tactics of resistance to machine-vision technologies employed in state and corporate surveillance. Zach Blas's *Facial Weaponization Suite* (2012–2014) and micha cárdenas's *Autonets* (2013) both imagine strategies of resistance for marginalized individuals—especially for women, queer, and trans people of color—that center upon obfuscating the body in order to evade AI sensors, biometric cameras, and network surveillance systems. Similarly, Everest Pipkin's *Image Scrubber* (2020), developed in the wake of global Black Lives Matter uprisings, offers an online tool for anonymizing photographs taken at protests that both removes metadata attached to the image and selectively blurs parts of the image like faces that can lead to identification.

Complementary to these critical projects, many other artists stage community-oriented platforms that aim to educate different publics and equip them with tools to address the harms of algorithmic culture. Nigerian-American artist Mimi Onuoha's *The People's Guide to AI* (2018), written in collaboration with Mother Cyborg, is a comprehensive beginner's guide that teaches readers about the discriminatory effects of data-driven technologies and prompts them to imagine alternative futures in which AI might be used to benefit marginalized communities. In the multi-year project *Feminist Data Set* (2017–), American artist Caroline Sindere stages a series of public-facing workshops, fora, toolkits, and datasets that examine every stage in the AI process (including data collection, training, modeling, and implementation) in order to interrogate issues of discrimination from an intersectional feminist lens. Similarly, American artist Stephanie Dinkins's *Project al-Khwarizmi (PAK)* (2017) brought together data scientists, artists, activists, and community members in a series of workshops to imagine and conceptualize AI-driven technologies (like a web-based chatbot) that interrupt those systems of power that impact communities of color. Finally, the Indigenous Protocols and Artificial Intelligence (IP-AI) working group conducted a

series of workshops in 2019 that convened artists, scholars, historians, storytellers, educators, scientists, and community organizers to discuss how the design of AI technologies might prioritize indigenous perspectives and epistemologies, and how the future of AI might enable the prosperity of all humans and non-humans in this world (see Lewis 2020). Across these projects, contemporary art practice is engaged as an opportunity for using algorithms as tools for social justice, turning emphasis away from the individual artist to consider community-oriented frameworks of collaboration and solidarity against the techno-essentialist frameworks of racial capitalist computation.

The Algorithmic Art Market

Just as much as algorithmic technologies afford novel modes of reflexivity and critique in art practice, they have also led to transformations in contemporary commerce, especially as they pertain to the manufacturing and selling of art. Consider, for example, *The Portrait of Edmond de Belamy* (2018) by the Paris-based art-collective Obvious (Figure 32.2). The artwork features an ordinary portrait of a standing male figure rendered in blurry ink-based swaths of white, tan, and brown. And yet, while perhaps unremarkable in content, the ink print sold at Christie's for US\$432,500.00 because it was the first artwork created by AI featured at the auction house. Using a form of algorithm called a generative adversarial network, the AI program constructed the image from a dataset of 15,000 portraits spanning from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century and taken from the online art encyclopedia WikiArt. Obvious does not claim sole authorship of the work but instead attributes authorship to the algorithm itself. In fact, in lieu of a signature, at the bottom right corner of the portrait is a portion of code used to produce the work. What's more, Obvious did not even write the code themselves. They simply downloaded existing code from another artist-programmer, Robbie Barrat, and made some slight adjustments before executing it



FIGURE 32.2 *The Portrait of Edmond de Belamy*, 2018 by the Paris-based art-collective, Obvious. Edmond de Belamy / Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain.

on their dataset to produce the portrait. By calling into question previously received ideas of authorship and labor, *The Portrait of Edmond de Belamy* gestures to the complex ways in which algorithms not only alter the nature of the image but also how art is produced, valued, and sold in an increasingly computationally driven art market.

In this final section, we therefore consider how algorithmic technologies have transformed the valuation of art as a commodity and how artists, dealers, and consumers in turn have responded to these changes. Central here is how algorithmic technologies meant to facilitate commerce and safeguard investments have impacted the production and consumption of art as a commodity on a global scale. Of course, such developments are a continuation of a longer economic trajectory of neoliberal financialization that has framed art in terms of its monetary value, rather than its aesthetic value, through the privatization and deregulation of creative economies (on these points, see Lee 2018; Prokupek 2021). In a moment in which the collection of art has been framed as a savvy venture, art markets in turn have been impacted by financial actors' imperative to secure their investments (Moreau, Sagot-Duvaurox, and Vidal 2015). This imperative materializes through various algorithmic technologies intended to identify and advertise to consumers most likely to purchase art, operating at scales ranging from the transnational mainstream to subcultural, regional, and niche markets (Velthuis and Curioni 2015).

As in other industries, the deployment of algorithmic technology to collect data on potential consumers to market to them has resulted in much controversy in the art world. Producers and brokers of art increasingly rely on algorithmic technology that sorts consumers into psychological profiles or identitarian archetypes through which they can be delivered custom content (Arora and Vermeylen 2013; Khaire 2015). Such personalized algorithms increasingly operate through methods of what Tizania Terranova calls "pointcasting," which targets individuals by appealing to their presumed emotions, ideologies, and personality profiles (Terranova 2004, 34). The case of Christie's is again instructive here. When you visit the auction house's website, you will be asked if you would like to accept "cookies" that "enhance site navigation, analyze site usage, and assist in our marketing efforts." While such efforts are often framed in the vernacular of "customer service," their primary objective is the expansion of their creators' or users' wealth through the "algorithmic identification of groups in terms of their suitability for economic exploitation" (Gandy 2021, 266). Ultimately, cookies track your purchases, quantify your attention, and otherwise attempt to create a cultural, economic, and psychological profile of you in order to optimize their marketing. Ethical issues in this form of data collection were further made obvious by Christie's acquisition of Collectrium, a software designed to help art collectors categorize and manage their collections, in 2015. This move was hailed by the auction house as a boon to the art lovers whom their business serves: "Collectrium provides support for all aspects of the art collection life cycle, enabling users to digitize and organize their art collection, browse and discover art, and keep track of art market data around their collection" (Christie's 2015). However, within three years, Collectrium became effectively moribund when another auction house, Heritage Auctions, accused them of stealing data from them, in turn, causing Collectrium's CEO to resign (Kinsella 2018). It is precisely through such data-based services where we can see how efforts to better facilitate connections between artists and consumers are vulnerable to the kinds of economic exploitation typical of our neoliberal moment.

In addition to customized marketing, the widespread deployment of algorithmic technology in the art market has yielded an explosion of get-rich-quick schemes, many of them concerned with facilitating trade and increasing value. Perhaps the most controversial among these has been the investor craze surrounding non-fungible tokens (NFTs). An NFT is a distinct and non-interchangeable unit of data stored in a blockchain, a public ledger that records transactions of information through various consensus algorithms. Importantly, as a decentralized and distributed computing system, the blockchain cannot be easily hacked, thus ensuring that there is a public record of all transactions and that only one person can own the NFT. This has had a profound impact for art since digital objects

can now be safeguarded from unauthorized replication. Through NFTs, digital art exists as a unique commodity for exchange and valuation.

Because assets sold on the blockchain only have one owner at a time and they exist within a market environment in which scarcity is enforced, the value of contemporary digital art sold as NFTs has skyrocketed. In turn, both artists and collectors have come to champion this algorithmic technology, including many who might otherwise be critical of inequality in the art market. For instance, the iconoclastic American graphic artist Beeple (the pseudonym of Michael Winkelmann) sold an NFT of a digital photo collage titled *EVERYDAYS: THE FIRST 5000 DAYS* at Christie's in March 2021 for US\$69 million. The work was celebrated as the first NFT sold by the auction house. However, what's notable about the sale is how it was framed as restitution for an artist who has long struggled to monetize his work, previously posting much of it to social media platforms like Instagram where the artist retains 2.5 million followers at the time of this writing. According to Noah Davis, a broker at Christie's, the sale was "a ritual assignment of value that is celebrating 13 years of hard work of him doing this for no financial gain" (Stonington and Reilly 2021). Similarly, in 2021, Japanese multimedia artist Hajime Sorayama began selling work in partnership with ZHEN., a software company that implants a unique chip inside each collectible object that corresponds to an NFT containing information on the item and its provenance. As is the case with blockchain technology, ZHEN. purports to protect the work, the artist, and potential buyers from forgery. Sorayama himself even remarked in an interview that this approach will ideally "develop a more trustable market" (Hore-Thorburn 2020). However, despite their potential for revolutionizing the sale of digital art, NFTs nonetheless mark a continuation of the legal and social paradigm of the individual artist as the primary financial beneficiary of their work, long codified in the international intellectual property law (Sinnreich 2019).

And yet, the adoption of algorithmic technologies in the production of art serves more than merely the interests of capital. In fact, through the example of *The Portrait of Edmond de Belamy*, we also witness how algorithmic technologies have the potential to lower barriers to entry for prospective artists. Its creators were among the many beneficiaries of the widespread availability of opensource algorithmic tools available to any artist with an Internet connection. Among these tools are software that use algorithms to write generative melodies and prose, produce generative images and videos, and print three-dimensional objects. These free algorithms, along with others, sponsored by nonprofits like the Processing Foundation, have often proven more effective for both emerging and established artists in creating work with code. In addition, many deployments of opensource technology are designed by artists. These include Joel Simon's Artbreeder, which allows users to produce art with neural networks (a kind of machine learner that processes information using hidden "nodes" meant to simulate biological neural circuits), and Brian Eno's Generative Music applications, which allow for expedited, user-friendly composition of music through algorithms that generate melodies. Moreover, websites like the code-hosting platform GitHub allow artists around the world to access community-generated source code for new projects. Thus, while algorithmic technologies have principally been deployed in artistic industries for the purpose of safeguarding the wealth of investors and artists who have already achieved success and fame, the examples of these software indicate that algorithmic technologies can democratize access to creative capital.

Conclusion

Algorithms have transformed contemporary visual culture and the arts in myriad ways. They have reshaped the nature of the image itself, prompting artists to interrogate a range of novel political and social issues across the globe. At the same time, they also continue to safeguard art as proprietary wealth in digital and networked markets. Thus, just as

algorithms emerge as novel creative media, they are also laden with commercial and corporate investments that reinforce power inequities in the art market. What remains to be seen then is the extent to which algorithmic technologies can enable artists to meaningfully critique and change the very systems of power within which those technologies function to classify individuals and predict their behavior.

Note

- 1 The term “algorist” was originally coined by Hébert following the 1995 SIGGRAPH ACM (the Special Interest Group for Graphics of the Association for Computer Machinery) conference held in Los Angeles. However, prior to this, Roman Verostko presented a position paper on algorithmic art at the Fourth International Symposium on Electronic Art in Helsinki in 1994. The full text can be read in Verostko (1994).

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Exhibition/Collecting/Archive

MUSEUM

Time, Love, and the Museum

Florencia San Martín

The art museum is a colonial institution that spread over major cities in Europe at the height of imperialism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As such, its hierarchical principles have designated what is art and thus has a higher value, celebrating art over artifact, aesthetics over ritual, Western over the so-called remote, and humans over non-humans, among other colonial binaries that have differentiated the West from its others. In this sense, it could be said that the art museum's colonial structure was shaped through what German philosopher Immanuel Kant conceptualized in his 1790 *Critique of Judgment* as aesthetic judgment. Writing during the Enlightenment and celebrating the role of reason in the shaping of the world, Kant believed that the beautiful was universal in scope, and thus judgment was practiced through intrinsic agreement. Furthermore, for Kant, in order to be beautiful an artwork could be judged outside of any context, prizing form, through formalist methods, as the primary source of "neutral" aesthetic decisions. And as the story goes, these beautiful artworks, not surprisingly made more typically by Western white men, occupied and still occupy the majority of the museum's walls and vaults, offering the beholder a "rational," "universal," and "transcendent" beauty.

What is hidden behind this logic of selecting and judging? Why are some makers, things, and cultural discourses considered better than others? Is the museum really a site for universal learning, neutrality, pleasure, and intrinsic agreement? Or does it rather fall, similarly to the capitalist world system in which we live, into the logic of coloniality that separates humans depending on their race, ability, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, and also validate some of them (and only some) over other living beings in the multiverse we indeed inhabit? And finally, how is the art museum connected to its corollary anthropology or natural history museum and how does that linking preserve and reflect a culture of colonialism based in oppositions?

This chapter is about contemporary artistic practices, discourses, and actions that engage with decolonial time and love together to challenge the museum's coloniality and to potentially transform the museum into a site of contingent and diverse creative practices elaborated through collective care and respect. Offering possibilities rather than fixed solutions, the case studies in this chapter, which are centered in the Americas, the region I study, are critical to the museum's strategies to conceptualize meaning vis-à-vis progressive time

and the imperative of reason. Ranging from artworks to cultural movements and political processes involving the law, these examples expose the uneven mediations of modernity's progress and the results of colonial violence from the space of the museum, drawing on aspect of what theorists have called decolonial time and critical concepts of love.

Decolonial Time/Decolonial Love

Coloniality is a complex system of power that celebrates the Western culture of rationality and capitalist values and is founded on whiteness in relation to colonized and enslaved others (Quijano 2007). Initiated by European men and institutions in the sixteenth century, coloniality was possible through the simultaneous colonization of both space and time (Mignolo 2009, 39). This means that alongside the conquest of the so-called "New World," Europe invented the Renaissance and the concept of modernity itself, and in so doing created a world system built from the spatial tropes of "expansion" and "salvation" and a temporality of "progression," "linearity," and "newness" (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992). Decolonial theorists argue that this spatial and temporal colonization resulted in multiple experiences of "invasion" and "appropriation" through "accumulative" instead of "successive" phases, including human genocides, epistemological erasures, and ecocides (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992). The time of coloniality therefore has only been possible through exploitation and extraction of natural resources in unceded lands; and in this process the oppressed—whether human or non-human—are deprived of memory and thus of culture (Vázquez 2009, 112). In this sense, as philosopher Rolando Vázquez explains, the time of coloniality "rejects the past, praises the present as the site of the real and the future as the horizon of expectation and the ultimate source of meaning" and in doing so "systematically suppresses the other [by] fostering the devaluation of ... alternative narratives" (Vázquez 2017, 113). Traumas of past violence are obliterated or ignored by the colonizing culture and yet, as Vázquez continues elsewhere: "[w]e live in a time of open wounds" (Vázquez 2017).

The suppression of the time of the other, that is, the erasure of the other's memory and culture, has been challenged by multiple practices, experiences, and discourses turning oblivion and erasure into signs and tools of resistance in different fights for visibility. These fights have developed through decolonial love, understood as both a biological condition and a cultural and political position. In *The Biology of Love*, biologist Maturana and Gerda Verden-Zöller that, as humans, we are genetically loving animals that cultivate aggression culturally, instead of genetically aggressive animals that love occasionally (Maturana and Verden-Zöller 2012). This means that, biologically, we love, and thus we can live in reciprocity with other humans, non-humans, and the environment. Maturana and Verden-Zöller argue that love "is the domain of those relational behaviors through which the other arises as a legitimate other in coexistence with oneself," (Maturana and Verden-Zöller 2012, 223). As a biological condition, love doesn't function through the colonial and "rational" logic of modernity's opposites that, as Latinx studies scholar Laura Pérez explains, "sees human beings as inferior or superior racially, by gender, class, ability, or other categories, to other humans [and] also sees humans as superior to the rest of the natural world" (Pérez 2019, 14). In the words of Chicana scholar Chela Sandoval, love exists "as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement" (Sandoval 2000, 140). Love is thus a tool of colonial resistance that humans are born with and that can be mobilized for preservation or recovery to enact social change in the contingent space of the political.

Evidently, this idea of love is not related to romantic or family love, or to the ways in which love is seen in our neoliberal era. An advanced form of capitalism implemented through authoritarian right-wing regimes from 1970s through the early 1990s, neoliberalism

celebrates market-oriented life through harsh forms of privatization, austerity, and a culture of individualism, reducing the influence of the communal state and limiting social rights and the dignity of non-hegemonic beings.¹ In our neoliberal present, in which individualistic and “reasonable” values of the Enlightenment have certainly prevailed, love, as Pérez writes, is seen as “apolitical and merely private and personal, emotional, or sexual, that is, supposedly, unwittingly, acquiescent to homogenic social orders” (Pérez 2019, 16). A bond that recognizes and validates the most basic humanity of those erased and denied by colonial constructs, decolonial love propels cooperation and thus it exists in the emotions of trust and mutual respect that take place in social manners of living, instead of in relations of submission and domination. In Maturana’s and Verden-Zöller’s words: “[c]ooperation is a consensual activity that arises in a domain of mutual acceptance in a cooperation that is invited, not demanded. The basic grounding emotion or mood in cooperation is love” (Maturana and Verden-Zöller 2012, 48). In this decolonial framework, love embraces mutual and communal care and consideration in an ethical togetherness that is biological, political, and cultural.

I argue that decolonial time and love are constitutive to one another, and that their presence in contemporary artworks, discourses, and activist actions has contributed and may continue to contribute toward current efforts to transform the museum into an equal and just site of creating, relating, and belonging. Regarding time, these practices are formulated against and beyond West-centric temporal regimes that celebrate chronological narratives and thus preserve oppression. As such, they unveil different struggles against domination through a politics of time that resists oblivion, invisibility, and erasure, disobeying modernity’s stereotype of the past as a fixed and archaic entity in history whose value in the present only exists in the form of documentation. In this sense, memory resides at the heart of these struggles, inviting modes of inhabiting, understating, and returning through relational temporalities that dismantle the present as the single site of experience and objectivity. And just as these practices are constituted as sites of memory, they are also built as sites of decolonial love, as they are created as, and thus offer, horizontal instead of hierarchical relational narratives and behaviors concerning different identities, cultures, and beliefs. Acknowledging that decolonial love is not about compassion, pity, or salvation but about the legitimacy of the other in relation to the self, these practices are developed from a place of mutual awareness toward a sense of community and well-being. Through relations of mutual care and understanding, the temporality of the oppressed is honored rather than being removed, forgotten, or documented as in modernity’s narration of history as a lineage of progressive achievements culminating in Western art. Furthermore, acknowledging diverse modes of inhabiting time supports collective practices of decolonial love.

Pulse

On the night of February 26, 1860, when the Wiyot tribe was performing a weeklong renewal ceremony in the Humboldt Bay region of the North Coast of California, a group of white supremacist colonists, after discovering gold in the Wiyot’s ancestral land, brutally killed many members of the tribe. Almost a century later, in 1953, a team from the University of California at Berkeley found the remains and artifacts from the massacre during the construction of a waterway in the area and collected them, that is, appropriated and stored them at the university’s Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. Since the origins of modern anthropology in the eighteenth century, this colonial practice of collecting, classifying, and preserving remnants from the so-called distant and remote past has been justified by the museum, with its Enlightenment values privileging.

In recent years, this practice has been disputed in both theory and practice through cultural and judicial endeavors. For instance, under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a US law that outlines a process for museums and federal

agencies to return Indigenous remains and cultural artifacts to their descendants, in February 2022, the Hearst Museum repatriated the remains and artifacts to Wiyot members, ending decades of stolen accumulation of collectible “treasures” related to the tribe. “They’ve been locked up in boxes and cabinets without having anyone to talk to and sing to them,” said Wiyot tribe historical preservation officer Ted Hernandez. “It’s always a great feeling to have our ancestors come home,” he continued, noticing the importance of repatriation for restoring and reinforcing relationships among Indigenous people, dead and alive, and their places and worldviews.²

However, despite concrete examples of decolonial practices such as this one, the museum’s colonial essence has not changed. In the case of the Hearst Museum, it is worth mentioning that in the first half of the twentieth century its collection of Indigenous objects was overseen by the eugenicist anthropologist Alfred Luis Kroeber. Known for having collected remains and sacred funerary objects from graves without the consent of tribes, he famously “saved” the life of a Yahi man, who, after witnessing the genocide of his people by white settler militias, was brought by Kroeber to live at the museum as a living exhibit. For Kroeber (and the museum overall), not only Indigenous sacred objects and bones signified extinction and death. Paradoxically, so did Indigenous survivors, humans, who (in spite of their obvious status as living and present) were objectified as ethnographic curiosities to confirm their remoteness and primitivism.³ From a decolonial perspective, this means that, alongside an imposed past to be studied, conserved, and displayed, the museum was also showing the ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples, that is, the systemic degradation of Indigenous life and dignity in the present.

UC Berkeley honored the “achievements” of Kroeber, a pioneer of anthropology in the American West, by naming after him the building on campus that houses the Hearst Museum and the Department of Anthropology and its Library, as well as the Departments of Art Practice and the Worth Ryder Art Gallery. Significantly for the discussion in this chapter about time, Kroeber’s name was used to label a discipline traditionally associated with the study of the past and another associated with the present through creative making and curation. Hence, for the university, Kroeber’s name came to signify a linearity of history, with Western culture and academia representing such capitalist progress through the self-assigned role of “saving” the “remote” past, humans, and lands.

In 2021, in the midst of the long and slow debate between the Wiyot tribe and the Hearst Museum and in the context of a global pandemic that—due to increased consciousness connected to Black Lives Matter protests—brought attention to the way in which minorities are disproportionately affected by such events, UC Berkeley announced the official removal of Kroeber’s name from the building (Kell 2021). Yet, UC Berkeley still holds one of the largest collections of Native American remains stolen from Indigenous gravesites and, in the process of repatriation, it “regularly requires tribes to submit [proof] beyond geographic evidence and oral history to prove tribal affiliation, lack[ing in their negotiations] the tribal representation required by law” (Lefebvre 2020). Kroeber’s legacy, despite his name being removed from the building, still gravitates in and beyond the hall’s façade and therefore in and beyond its previous and current name. Formulated by one side of history, that of the colonizer, this so-called dialogue between two cultures not only ignores and denies Indigenous modes of knowing such as oral histories. The institutions often implement a tactic of delay (NAGPRA’s federal law was passed by Congress in 1990) and the continued appropriation of stolen human remains and artifacts seems to ally more with pity and an idea of colonial “rescue” than with deep listening and an understanding of colonized people. What this process ignores is the decolonial temporality of non-progressive epistemologies and forms of living, sensing, and remembering that are at the heart of Indigenous worldviews and, more broadly, of the ways in which cultures of resistance have been imaging and practicing nonlinear memory politics. In so doing, this process also shows the prevalence of hierarchical and “rational” modes of production of meaning at the

museum and thus the absence of ethical relations of cooperation and horizontal legitimization, that is, of decolonial love. Simply put, in cases such as that at the Hearst Museum, while the subaltern speaks, she is not really being listened to, showing the “metaphorical” nature of shallow decolonization narratives and actions taking place in the Western and westernized museum (on this point, see Tuck and Yang 2012).

Just as with the case of the museum of anthropology, the art museum’s implementation of colonial temporality since its modern origins in the late eighteenth century has determined its cultural and geopolitical reach, on the one hand, and has fixed temporal meanings between artworks and beholder, on the other hand. Art historian Andrew McClellan maintains that the art museum and anthropological museum are interlaced and that their “ideals and utopian thinking overlap from a point of common origin in early modern Europe through the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution to the present” (McClellan 2008, 9). It is from this location of Western enunciation, as McClellan argues by quoting the then director of the Museum of Metropolitan Art, Philippe de Montebello, that the art museum is seen to “offer solace, affirmation, and a spirit of renewal [through] great art [that] can enlighten, inspire, awe, and ultimately, help heal” (McClellan, 9). In reality, however, said offering is limited only to viewers who can identify themselves with the objects shown in the museum, valued through Eurocentric colonialist hierarchies as superior and justified under the paradigms of reason and aesthetic judgment formulated during the Enlightenment. “I believed the museum world was not my world,” writes art historian Kency Conejo, recalling her experience as a teenager during an internship at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art:

As a *guanaca* (the appellative given to people from El Salvador) ... from the hood—in my case Compton, California, a city made notorious by gangsta rap and police brutality—people like me ... did not write the history of art, for if we had, we would see ourselves represented on the walls (Conejo 2019, 72).

How can the art museum’s collection of “great art” enlighten, inspire, awe, and ultimately help in healing members of an audience that don’t recognize in their bodies, senses, perceptions, and memories what is shown and how it is shown? Preventing the physical access to, and deep dialogue with, cultures of resistance, the museum is essentially blocking the ethical forms of cooperation that legitimize different cultures and memories (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 110). The museum is thus foreclosing the potential of decolonial time and decolonial love. “Can we live an ethical life in a world in which our well-being and sense of self is implicated on the suffering of human and non-human others and the extraction of Earth?” asks Vázquez (2017) regarding time. Regarding love, as Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2012) ask: “Can we live in mutual and ethical care and cooperation and at the same time deny that through rational justification and aggression?” Understanding time and love together in the space of the museum, we can also ask: How can the museum that erases the temporality of the oppressed through hierarchical processes be decolonized if its very structure is founded and justified under colonial principles? As one of the editors of this volume put it: “Art is not incidental to the success of Europe’s violent subjugation of colonized and enslaved peoples, and this constructed system of values in relation to art has had concrete effects” (Jones 2021, 97). Is the decolonization of the museum even possible? What efforts have been made and what challenges have those attempting to decolonize the museum faced?

Cultural anthropologist Shelly Errington has explained that there is a difference between “art by appropriation” and “art by intention” (see Errington 1994, 201–226). This means that there are objects that were not intentionally made in the Western sense as aesthetic artworks to be contemplated at the museum and, as Carolyn Dean has argued, by calling something art “we also risk suggesting that cultures that did not possess the concept of art ought to have and that they somehow benefit in having the concept introduced to (and for) them” (Dean 2006, 26). In the museum’s theft, the other is supposed to be grateful for the

preserving and aestheticizing of their artifacts and ancestors' remains. This is despite losing in this process their pulsing meaning. Once discovered, appropriated, transported, classified, stored in repositories, and only sometimes exhibited, their living pulse, that is, their dynamic contingency that resides in their hearts as reciprocal entities use them to reciprocate and relate to others becomes materiality, design, past, remoteness, art.

In 2018, for instance, a delegation of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) visited the British Museum in London to start the repatriation process of the Hoa Hakananai'a moai.⁴ Carved in basalt around the twelfth century at the Rano Raraku volcano for Orongo, a ceremonial village located at the southwestern end of Rapa Nui, the features of Hoa Hakananai'a are similar to those of other moai on the island: a blocky face, thick forehead, prominent nose and chin, hollowed-out eyes, long rectangular ears, nipples, slender arms slanted to the sides, and hands reaching to the stomach, which is near the base. Hoa Hakananai'a is different from other moai, however, in that its back is engraved with scenes associated with the cult of the birdman, *tangata manu*. Central to Rapa Nui society, this cult consisted of an annual competition to select the island's chief for the year. To become chief, participants, who were revealed in dreams, had to obtain the first egg of the season from the offshore of Moto Nui, the largest of three islets at the southern end of Rapa Nui. They then had to swim back to the island and finally climb the sea cliff of Rano Kau to its top, near Orongo.

Hoa Hakananai'a is the spirit of a *tangata manu* ancestor. If returned to the island, it would recover its meaning as a living protector of the Rapa Nui through its connection to *mana*.⁵ The principal energy in Rapa Nui cosmovision, *mana* is an ontology based upon notions of reciprocity, kinship, and respect between the living, the ancestors, and the land. As such, it embraces a relational source of vitality that is responsible for the fertility of earth and seas and for well-being, knowledge, and harmony among humans.⁶ "We want the museum to understand that the moai are our family, not just rocks. For us [the moai] is a brother, but for them, it is a souvenir or an attraction," said Anakena Manutomatoma, who serves on the island's development commission (see Garabedian 2022). Standing at the front of the classical façade of the British Museum and its Greek temple-inspired columns, triangular pediment, and massive steps, Rapa Nui governor Tarita Rapu said through tears: "We came here, but we are just the body. You, the England people, have our soul" (see Garabedian 2022). The colonial looting of the moai occurred in 1868 by a British research mission commanded by Richard Ashmore Powell, who upon his return to England the following year gifted his "discovery" to Queen Victoria, who in turn gave it to the British Museum (Rapu does not recall the looting of the clip). Begging for the return of the moai, Tarita Rapu continued: "You have kept him for 150 years, just give us some months, and we can have it there."⁷

In the absence of a repatriation law, and aware that museums in Europe have already loaned some sacred items back to their original owners, Tarita Rapu begged the museum to lend them the moai so it could go back to *mana*, even if temporarily. This shows that for the Rapa Nui, the living energy and spirituality of Hoa Hakananai'a remains potent, despite having been displayed at the British Museum, a temple of the past that freezes such objects for timeless and depoliticized contemplation. In other words, the pulse of its existence has not dissipated, despite the colonial appropriation of its meaning and its distance from Orongo. We can thus say that the spirit of *tangata manu* is perhaps only sleeping. It will be awakened on its return to the multiple temporal and spiritual relationalities of *mana*, and it will go back to sleep again if it is loaned but then returned to the British Museum.⁸ Responding to this petition, a delegation from the British Museum traveled to Rapa Nui in 2019 to discuss the repatriation of Hoa Hakananai'a, publicly announcing that the institution "is developing a long-term relationship with the community of Rapa Nui, to bring staff time and resources to collaborative research and reinterpretation of the Rapanui [sic] collections for the benefit of the community and the wider world."⁹ The Hoa Hakananai'a has still not been returned to Rapa Nui, signalling that the British Museum is deploying the colonial tactic of delay to block the vital urgency of repatriation, preventing the pulsing

heart of the moai, from being reengaged in its home location. Emotionally laden oral evidence provided in 2018 by two Rapa Nui women, in addition to the plea by Tarita Rapu, were not enough to sway the museum.¹⁰ Mourning was not enough. Life was not enough.

The Western museum of timeless treasures claims that more resources and clock time (which for them started in 2018) are needed for collaborative research of their Rapa Nui collection. But, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, the term research “is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism [and] is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 1). After all, research in “collaboration” with the Rapa Nui commenced the excavation and appropriation of Hoa Hakananai’a in the late nineteenth century by the British Empire, which at the time had established an “informal empire of free trade” in Chile, the newly independent nation state that would soon annex the island to its continental territory (Gallagher and Robinson 1953).¹¹ And Chile, just like the British Museum, still holds in its museums multiple objects appropriated from Rapa Nui. Yet, this won’t stop the Rapa Nui from continuing to fight for the awakening of Hoa Hakananai’a and other moai and vital objects now sleeping in different museums, hoping that eventually, just as happened with the case of the Wiyot tribe, they will go back to *mana* as living energies connected with their lands, waters, airs, senses, language, and their people’s pasts, presents, and futures. Communal love that arises from relational behaviors of cooperation, and the commitment of the Rapa Nui people to the legitimacy of their relational time, motivate their fight and its continuity. Decolonial time and love are thus both at stake in the process of repatriation and decolonial healing.

Action

In his 1940 “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin famously wrote that “[t]here has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism. And just as it is itself not free from barbarism, neither is it free from the process of transmission, in which it falls from one set of hands into another” (Benjamin 2003, 391). A temple of the Enlightenment and its legacy, both barbaric and progressive at once, the museum draws on transmission to stay loyal to itself. By absence or presence, or by erasure or appropriation, museums’ collection of non-Western art, as was stated in the introduction to this chapter, has since its origins aimed at one fixed temporal meaning for the beholder: a timeless and depoliticized contemplation of universal and transcendent beauty.

This aspect of “timelessness” was explained by former curator of the Louvre Museum in Paris, Germain Bazin, in his 1967 *The Museum Age*, the first comprehensive study of the history of museums since David Murray’s 1904 *Museums, Their History and Their Use*. Describing the museum as “a temple where Time seems suspended,” Bazin maintains that “the visitor enters it in the hope of finding one of those momentary cultural epiphanies that give him the illusion of knowing intuitively his essence and his strength” (Bazin 1967, 7). Capitalizing the term *time* and thus turning it into a proper name that prevents the idea of time as a multiplicity of complex relationalities, Bazin removes the museum of modernity from politics, in the sense that contingency in relation to multiple pasts, presents, and futures is what motivates the political. From this perspective, the museum’s aim is to “release” the viewer from life’s struggles through the tranquility of non-temporal and non-local experiences when observing (and not responding). In recent years, this dynamic has been endorsed by art historians such as McClellan, who concludes the introduction of his *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao*, a widely assigned book in art history programs in the United States, as follows:

Even if art museums do nothing more than offer a space of tranquil beauty in which to be moved by the creativity and humanity of people far removed in time and space, should we be disappointed? For better or worse, a celebratory but depoliticized global humanism may be as much as we can expect from our art museums in years to come (McClellan 2008, 52).

Not quite. As Carol Duncan has argued, even if the museum designs its ideal—still colonial—narrative for the ideal spectator, one of a specific (instead of universal) social, racial, and cultural background, “no real visitor ever perfectly corresponds to these ideals”; put differently, even if the museum’s aim is to satisfy the dominant audiences of museums (primarily white middle-class people in the 1990s as Duncan is writing) through colonialist tactics, “[i]n reality, people continually ‘misread’ or scramble or resist the museum’s cues” (Duncan 1995, 479). Such was the case of Kency Cornejo, mentioned earlier. Upon realizing that the museum world was not her world, Cornejo decided to use her PhD in art history actively to denounce the institutional racism and white supremacy through decolonial scholarship and curating relating to contemporary Central American and Latinx art. For Cornejo this denunciation is driven by her “rage” and propelled by “love” (Cornejo 2019, 74). “It was those systematic attacks on my world that ironically led me to the field of art history, and shaped my scholarship and pedagogy” Cornejo wrote, continuing, “[m]y love was, as Cuban musician Silvio Rodríguez described in a song he dedicated to the Salvadoran people, *un amor de abajo* (a love from below)” (Cornejo 2019, 72, 74). But will the museum decolonize itself if such a task is performed through decolonial time and love, a love from below?

In her 2017 text, “The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised,” UK-based writer and curator Sumaya Kassim states that decolonizing the museum is a daunting task since the museum is “so embedded in the history and power structures that decoloniality challenges” (Kassim 2017). She argues that not only does the museum’s “systemic whiteness” symbolize “historic and ongoing trauma and theft” for people of color like herself but its recent “commitment to ‘diversity’, ‘inclusion’ or ‘decoloniality’” also risks a situation in which “decolonisation become[s] part of Britain’s national narrative as a pretty curio with no substance—or, worse, ... decoloniality [comes] to be claimed as yet another great British accomplishment” (Kassim 2017). It is worth repeating here Tuck and Yang’s crucial warning: “decolonization is not a metaphor”; for decolonization to happen, as Kassim maintains, the work has to be collective and the museum must reflect critically on its practices to avoid neoliberal approaches to diversity, tolerance, and inclusion.

This aim to transform the museum and the critique into decolonial metaphors is shown in *Solidarity Redux: Black Lives Matter*, a thirty-six-minute long video made in 2022 by Black multi-disciplinary artist Lava Thomas (Figure 33.1). In it, Thomas reads a series of statements of solidarity made by different museums in the United States in the wake of the



FIGURE 33.1 Lava Thomas, *Solidarity Redux: Black Lives Matter*, 2022. Still from video; black and white, sound, thirty-six minutes. Courtesy of Lava Thomas.

massive protests that followed the brutal killing in May 2020 of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many other women, men, and non-binary Black people by the police with their systemic racism. She reads from her laptop, which is placed on a minimal black desk, which is in turn positioned vertically toward the camera. An overhead blue light illuminates the scene, creating a theater-like image and projecting elongated shadows of the artist, her desk, and the chair in which she sits. Continuously repeating itself in a loop, the video consists of three different frames that change between the statements. One of these frames shows a full view of the scene, leaving the left third of the frame in total blackness. At the center is the artist illuminated from above, and at the right are her shadows and those of the desk and chair. The directed blue light creates an oval-like contour at the bottom that goes from center to right. Dressed in loose black clothing, Thomas's hair, ankles, T-shirt, and left forearm are illuminated. So are her hands, profile, and the top outline of her desk and laptop. The second frame shows a medium shot of the scene. Now, we don't see projected shadows on the floor. Finally, the third frame blows up the scene even further, with the artist's body and device touching the frame's edge. With headphones provided to the visitor, we can hear her reading. She reads slowly, with a convinced, engaging, and driven voice for each of the statements. She sometimes raises her eyebrows, slightly. Other times, and less often, she looks briefly at the camera, for only a second. Her body doesn't move; only her ring, middle, and index fingers from the right hand touch her laptop's touchpad, so she can continue reading.

The repeated action of her fingers is the only thing that moves constantly, and yet it remains the same: a mechanical movement that, just as the video's frames and loop, is, after a few minutes of watching, predictable and unchangeable. So are the statements. Except for a few institutions that have actually and actively worked, through decolonial love, for the visibility of the Black community—such as The Studio Museum in Harlem—the majority of the institutions issued statements that were interchangeable. The dramatic effect created by the theater lighting, alongside the emotiveness of the artist's voice as she reads and the sense of seriousness produced through the minimal setting of furniture, device, pose, and framings are all put into question through the banality of the words and meaning of the statements. Not only are museums as institutions similar in their practices today but the museum of today is similar in structure to the museum of the past. So was the case of the Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the British Museum. In this sense, Thomas's work shows that the fight for visibility, dignity, memory, and justice that led millions to the street to demand racial and social justice in collectivity has not yet really entered the museum. Yet, Lava Thomas is still there at the museum, hoping to transform it through solidarities of care, respect, and cooperation that can indeed exist between and among humans. And since solidarity is precisely what the neoliberal "diversity" statements of the museums ignored, Thomas titled the video *Solidarity Redux: Black Lives Matter*. With the word "redux" meaning returning, it could be said that the artist was advocating for a multidirectional and non-teleological time, one that actively participates through love in the recognition of bodies, memories, and histories that our racialized and neoliberal present denies or criminalizes.

Memory

The museum as a site of memory and life is exemplarily shown in Alfredo Jaar's *Geometry of Conscience*, (2010), a memorial for the victims of the Chilean military dictatorship (1973–1990). In this work, Jaar turned the museum into a site that resists erasure of pasts, presents, and futures in the collective body, creating dynamic horizontal dialogues toward healing through loving (Figure 33.2). Commissioned in 2010 by the newly inaugurated Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago and located underground beneath the museum's plaza, the work is a minimal cubic installation that the viewer accesses by



FIGURE 33.2 Alfredo Jaar, *The Geometry of Conscience*, 2010. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

descending thirty-three steps. Once underground, and after one minute of full darkness, the viewer sees hundreds of silhouettes of heads created by Jaar, modeled after photographs of living and dead Chileans, which are lit up on the front wall. Rendered in the form of a grid, the silhouettes multiply to infinity in mirrors located on contiguous walls. The process lasts for ninety seconds, projecting an increasingly intense light. Suddenly, everything plunges back into darkness, creating a strong imprint on the viewer's retina. Refusing the possibility of passive spectatorship, Jaar's memorial interrupts the frozen past of most memorial monuments and resists a fixed temporality that fixes the past. Through the juxtaposition of silhouetted heads made from photographs of both the living and the dead, the work embraces the idea that the dictatorship has not finished, as the legacy that motivated it in the first place still dominates every aspect of human life, including death.

Jaar is referring to the dictatorship and its legacies in Chile. On September 11, 1973, a US-backed military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende. As is well known, the coup's main aim was not only ideological but also economic, with the coup symbolizing the global launching of a second and more durable ghostly regime—that of the untrammelled free market. In the words of this economic model's architect, US-based neoliberal economist Milton Friedman, Chile served as “the global laboratory of neoliberalism,” with the dictatorship's violence enabling the ideal, miraculous scenario for a privatized marketplace that would eventually control not only the economy but also culture, politics, and life overall.¹² Since the return to democracy in 1990, the dictatorship's ghost, that is, the continuity of neoliberal authority in present day Chile, has justified the systematic killing, torture, imprisonment, and censorship of thousands who have protested their deprivation and loss of the possibility of living a dignified life in a highly unequal society. Indigenous peoples, non-white immigrants, women, sexual dissidents, peasants, the working class, and students have seen their possibilities of communal care and respect, that is, of love, limited to the point of collapse, propelling a massive social uprising across Chile. Commenced in 2019, this uprising certainly marked a massive decolonial turn in Chilean and Latin American social history.

In this context, and more so in 2023, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the coup, the Museum of Memory and Human Rights has served as a site of gathering, welcoming dissidents with protest signs and voicing, as loudly as possible, mottos such as “*Nunca Más*” (“Never again”); and “*Hasta que la dignidad se haga costumbre*” (“Until dignity becomes

the norm"). The aesthetics, poetics, and politics of Jaar's memorial are certainly not buried, despite the memorial being located underground, beneath the museum's plaza. In turn, with the silhouetted heads of both living and dead Chileans multiplied to infinity in the mirrors, Jaar's memorial portrays not just one or a certain, fixed number of victims, highlighting that "disappearance and torture are not only individual problems, and that crimes have a serious impact in the survivor, their families; the social fabric overall" (Kaleck 2019).

Conclusion

Criticizing and reframing the museum from within, the examples I have provided show that the museum is not only a site for the display and reification of the past but also a site of dynamic and political contingencies in which histories of the past, present, and future can be reframed, together. They also show that the museum is not just a site of display and contemplation but also one that propels action in collectivity, engaging with critical practices involving the larger and diverse communities that indeed form the world. Finally, they show that the museum is not merely a site for death, that is, a mausoleum of collectible treasures that neutralizes culture and prevents the beholder from developing a vital relation with what they see (Adorno 1967). The museum is also a site of survival and thus of memory and life.

The artists, movements, activist actions, and critical debates examined here invite us to engage in a decolonial memory politics that is as much about survival, resistance, and building something for the future as it is about the past, embracing a dynamic temporality in which the legacies of the past are not justified, forgotten, nor reconciled in order to modernize the nation, the museum, the world. They invite us to create "contact zones of ways of thinking and being that truly come from different kinds of experiences of living and dying," as Donna Haraway has described decolonial time (Haraway 2017). In so doing, we can thus advance the museum's profound transformation into a site of contingent and diverse forms of creative practices elaborated in acts of ethical respect, cooperation, and care, that is, through a collective and pulsing heart.

Notes

- 1 For more on neoliberalism vis-à-vis its implementation through conservative right-wing regimes globally and more specifically in the context of Latin America, see Grandin (2013).
- 2 Hernandez, cited in Wilson (2022).
- 3 For more on the colonial practice of exhibiting humans in museums and international exhibitions, see Fusco (1994).
- 4 See the YouTube video of a delegation from Easter Island, backed by the Chilean government, in London to ask for the return of a Moai statue important to the indigenous people of the island and on display at the British Museum. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJkmRD49znI>, accessed May 8, 2023.
- 5 For more on mana, see Arthur (2015). For a critical study on colonization at large in the context of Rapa Nui see Delsing (2015).
- 6 For more on the repatriation of Hoa Hakananai'a specifically see *Tē Kubane o Tē Tupuna (el espíritu de los ancestros)*, directed by Leonardo Pakarati (2015; Chile: *Mahatua Producciones*, DVD; and for repatriation in relation to Rapa Nui in general see Arthur (2020).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 For more on the rapanui temporal relationality, see Štambuk (2010).
- 9 See "Moai," *The British Museum* online. Available at: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/moai>.

- 10 For more on the relevance of orality in Rapa Nui see Abarca (2015).
- 11 For more on Chile's history of colonial policy toward Rapa Nui, see Arthur (2015).
- 12 For critical readings regarding Friedman's idea on the Chilean miracle, see Klein (2007); Richards (2013); Valdés (1995).

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BIENNIAL/ART FAIR

Biennial as a Discursive Political System for Contemporary Art

Jane Chin Davidson

The year 2022 was an eventful one for biennials and global expositions. The Venice Biennale, for the first time since its inception in 1895 as the first international art exhibition, presented works that were in the majority by women-identified artists, with chief curator Cecilia Alemani's title *The Milk of Dreams* reintroducing the 1950s allusions of Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington.¹ As well, the much-anticipated documenta fifteen was transformed by the artists' collective ruangrupa from Indonesia, whose aim in organizing the quinquennial (held every five years) in Kassel, Germany, was to translate their local ideals of *lumbung* to curating by implementing a collective-sharing practice (*lumbung* is Indonesian for communal "rice barn," and points to their focus on collaboration).² The Whitney Biennial's belated opening in 2022 capped the seminal year in global expositions, marking the public return from the COVID-19 pandemic (the biennial had been slated for 2021); the exhibition titled *Quiet as It's Kept* not only expresses the grief over the three years of COVID-19 isolation but also the intense period of racial and political violence in the United States.

Of course, the pandemic was never the existential cause of the sea-change in these enormous European and US exhibitions. Since the 1980s, the initiative to *represent* gender, sexuality, race, class, and culture in Euro-American contexts was founded on the challenge by artists, curators, critics, and historians who advocated for women-identified, non-binary, non-white, non-upper-class, and non-hegemonic curating in exhibitions long circumscribed by an entrenched institutional art system. Without question, the biennial's particular model as a performative "archive" for art of the moment has shaped artistic and curatorial practices since the 1980s.

But the fact that it took over a hundred years for the Venice Biennale to host for the first time a show of works by over 60% women artists says something about the long history of exclusion in these influential shows. *The Milk of Dreams* comes very late in the scope of the exposition's history (and the statistics for women represented in all art exhibitions internationally on the whole remains lower than men). Because documenta began in 1955, its first-time curatorial leadership by a collective of non-European artists, particularly ruangrupa's

Indonesian cultural collective, breaks ground from a shorter historical trajectory. This choice of leadership is a change from documenta's history of foregrounding primarily European and American art, in spite of its longstanding claims for exhibiting a "global" art show.

This chapter seeks to acknowledge the historic tension within these international art exhibitions between their claims of global representation and the status quo in Eurocentric concepts of art by examining the nation-building methods through which both the Venice Biennale and documenta serve as archetypal models for all other biennials, triennials, and global festivals of contemporary art. What does it mean when organizers, curators, and artists regularly engage in the politics of the biennial institution, but all the while being sponsored and funded by their country's nationalist programs?

An Expo History of Fascism and Imperialism

From the start, global expositions were imperial events, laying the groundwork for the civic/state/national agencies that continue to run them many generations later. In my essay "The Politics of Trans/nationalism and Global Expositions," I argue that biennials and triennials were "closely related to the nineteenth-century world's fairs, once described by Walter Benjamin as 'places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish,'" they were developed during the era of industrial empire when "nearly every metropolitan city in Europe and the United States had hosted a world exposition, and nearly all of these spectacular shows of progress included palaces devoted to fine art" (Chin Davidson 2020, 9). Begun with the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London, world's fairs were overtly called "colonial expositions" and "empire exhibitions," and the contemporary art version of the fairs inaugurated by the 1895 Venice Biennale followed the same template by replicating their structural tendencies for staging nationalist production: through their display of art objects next to manufactured objects, the world's fairs propagandized nation-statist ideals while normalizing the capitalist industrial order. These so-called "global" expositions, actually based on Eurocentric concepts, thereafter adopted the same template for visualizing nationalist/capitalist/industrial power as exemplified, for instance, by Kyoto's Expo 70, in which the 1970 world's fair was the vehicle for the Japanese state to promote their new Tsuruga Nuclear Plant (Yoshimoto 2011, 9).

The 1955 inauguration of documenta, however, would establish the mutually exclusive ideals that global art expositions now seem to embody: whereas the Venice Biennale instantiated the political use of expositions on behalf of colonial empire, documenta envisioned their emancipatory potential. Hailed as the exhibitionary manifesto to liberate artistic expression from Hitler's prohibitions, the objective by Kassel painter and professor Arnold Bode is still articulated on documenta's website as to "bring Germany back into dialogue with the rest of the world after the end of World War II ... in order to present art that had been deemed by the Nazis as degenerate as well as works from classical modernity that had never been seen in Germany in the destroyed Museum Fridericianum."³ documenta is credited with being the point of departure for exhibiting liberation ideals, but the emancipation model for the *anti-colonial* state festival would actually be developed by organizers, artists, and state actors on behalf of non-European countries. I argue that this history legitimately belongs to leaders such as Senegalese poet, cultural theorist, and President Léopold Sédar Senghor, who in 1966 created the *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres*, the first decolonial arts exposition in Dakar. His contribution to the progressive liberation aesthetics of biennials was inspirational, and the use of expositions for the project of political liberation extended to the 1984 Bienal de La Habana and the 1995 Gwangju Biennale. This chapter provides a decolonial context for what were previously called "Third World" biennials by recognizing their role in expressing a specifically African, Cuban, or Korean concept of independence in their respective nations.

In truth, the European circuit of industrial-colonial empire continues in many ways to maintain the biennial's original structures of imperial power despite the recent efforts to update their Eurocentrism as noted at the beginning of this chapter. What has come to light in 2021 has changed the assumptions regarding the historic relationship of the German and Italian expositions to fascism, either against Hitler in Kassel in 1955 or in support of Mussolini in Venice in 1928. The exhibition *documenta. Politics and Art* (June 2021—January 2022), presented at the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin, explosively destroyed the liberatory narrative of *documenta*'s anti-fascist manifesto. In the course of conducting research for the exhibition, focusing “on the relation between politics and art,” the curatorial team discovered the truth about Bode's collaborator Werner Haftmann.⁴ Haftmann was a celebrated art historian who worked closely with Bode to create *documenta*, all the while hiding his fascist past: a Nazi member since 1937, he had been the leader of a military unit deployed in Italy to combat partisan forces. Historian Carlo Gentile asserts that under his command “civilians were killed, suspects were tortured” (see Gross et al. 2021, 70);⁵ while art historian Julia Voss explains that, “in 1946, Haftmann was wanted as a war criminal by the Italian authorities” because he was implicated in the murder of Jewish and political artists (see Gross et al. 2021, 13). The first three *documenta*s that Haftmann helped organize “not only excluded artworks that addressed the violence and murders in the Third Reich, but also artists who were victims of the Nazis” (Deutsche Welle 2021). Moreover, of the twenty-one people who founded the first *documenta*, ten of them were also former Nazi members from the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) or the other paramilitary groups known as the SA or the SS.⁶

The fascist history of the Venice Biennale is better known, although not very often discussed. In 1966 the British curator and art critic Lawrence Alloway traced the development, beginning with the political shift in 1928 when Vittorio Emanuele III, the king of Italy, and Benito Mussolini signed into law their new commission to run the exposition. Alloway describes the politics of the new agency:

Under Fascism the range of the Biennale as an international affair diminished as a tough Italian nationalism gained confidence ... The structure of the Biennale, whether run by the City or as a separate Agency, remained constant: massive Italian coverage at the center of autonomous national exhibitions. This form, susceptible of drastic changes of content, has proved capable of absorbing cultural and political shifts without damage to the stability of the exhibition (Alloway 1968, 16).

Alloway recognizes the increasing influence of fascism at the biennials held between 1920 and 1942; he also notes that the international modern style of the national pavilions built during this period tended to be driven by conservative rather than experimental concerns. He argues that fascism up through the 1930s was “by no means universally distasteful” as reflected in the growth in sales of works by Italian artists and the reviews of the Venice Biennale exhibitions during this period (Alloway 1968, 96). The fascist movement in Italy aligned with American technocratic ideals. Alloway argues that the fascists' view of art was “racial and retrospective,” and explains that their nationalist rationale asserted the Renaissance origins of works by modern Italian artists exhibiting at the Biennale such as Giorgio di Chirico, Alberto Savinio, and Carlo Carrà, whose nostalgic introspective *Pittura Metafisica* (metaphysical painting) school represented a “classicizing and racist art theory” (Alloway 1968, 96). The fact that Hitler conducted a state visit in 1934 to meet with Mussolini at the Venice Biennale verifies Alloway's assertion that the institution itself would remain untainted by his visit or by association with Nazism. The fascist history of both Venice and Kassel exhibitions is repressed to the degree that the timeless acceptability of these exhibitions can be asserted; this dark history is one of the reasons why the old institutional structures have rarely been destabilized (to acknowledge the history would be, de

facto, to destabilize it). The role of the arts as evidence of artistic freedom can therefore be used in contradictory ways by democratic states and repressive regimes alike.

The Expo 70 world's fair in 1970 presents another example from the standpoint of Japanese imperialism and post-WWII restitution efforts. Midori Yoshimoto considers this state-sponsored event held in Osaka as the "major turning point not only in Japanese art, architecture, and design, but also in the history of world expositions as a whole" (Yoshimoto 2011, 2). Since the 1950s, the rituals, actions, and events of the Gutai group and the Red Hi Center are largely understood as seminal works of resistance against the imperialism that brought Japan to war. In Yoshihara Jirō's *Gutai Manifesto*, the leader rejected the "fraudulent" art of the past to "bid farewell to the hoaxes piled up on the altars and in the palaces" (Yoshihara 1994, 370). As the art-historical narrative goes, Gutai artists had innovated artistic conceptualism to break from the Japanese sovereignty that resulted in the atomic devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ironically, Gutai's participation in Expo 70 would change this narrative. Due to their involvement, they came to be seen as complicit with the Japan Atomic Power Company's debut of their new Tsuruga Power Plant at Expo 70, touting the supposedly clean nuclear energy being used at the fair (Hiro 2016, 99). By 1970, the Japanese public rejected nuclear bombs while simultaneously endorsing nuclear energy.

In his recent article, Kuro Dalai Jee is uncompromising in his criticism of the Gutai Art Festival presented at Expo 70 as "no more than an enjoyable attraction for family," since Gutai was now co-opted by the "state and capitalist corporations [who] tried to brainwash the whole nation with the fantasy of internationalization and technological utopia" (Jee 2013, 424). Even at the time, however, there was controversy. By the late 1960s, there was a new generation of Japanese performance artists emerging in the form of radical protest and activism (Yoshimoto 2011, 5).⁷ In particular the Expo 70 Destruction Joint-Struggle collective took to the streets with their provocative performances, targeting Expo 70 specifically. Dalai Jee clarifies that their goal was "aimed at the 'destruction' (*hakai*) of Expo '70 held in Osaka, a state project that, involving a number of major corporations, set out to showcase the economic growth and internationalization of 1960s Japan" (Jee 2013, 438). Expo 70 was a world's fair, and not officially a contemporary art biennial or triennial, but the radical artists viewed the event as a continuation of the nationalist, capitalist norm of state art expositions. As radical agitators, the anti-Expo 70 Destruction Joint-Struggle Group took to public "teach-ins," naked provocations, and wild demonstrations against the Expo 70 and all global expositions, now seen as connected to the state and its new technocorporate-capitalist nationalism (Jee 2011, 170).

Still, these international shows can also contribute to the political *critique* of state and capitalist systems. Okwui Enwezor, the biennial director par excellence, once suggested that global expositions "reflect serious discursive systems" with the potential for initiating social change, which led the Nigerian poet and curator to argue in the strongest terms that "biennials are immensely transformative for specific locale" (Griffin 2008, 231). To date, at least 111 cities and states around the world have presented some version or other of the biennial, triennial, quadrennial, or quinquennial, and Enwezor was involved in organizing a number of these recurring expositions of contemporary art. But as a groundbreaking curator (who died much too early in 2019), Enwezor held the title for being the first Black director (and non-European) to chair the two principal models of the international art exhibition: the Venice Biennale (2015) and documenta (number eleven, in 2002). Coming from a nation formerly colonized by Great Britain, his commitment to the Euro-global-expo model begs the question: Why he was so optimistic about these expositions, especially when recognizing the significance of the 120-year wait before the first African director was invited to lead the Venice Biennale—a wait not unrelated to the Biennale's Eurocentrism and nefarious fascist history? While Enwezor challenged the European institution of biennials/quinquennials, he saw their potential precisely because of the contributions of what Gerardo Mosquera defines as historically "Third World" biennials—the decolonial festivals that established

liberation aesthetics in order to memorialize a community's break from colonialism and to celebrate the human spirit after long periods of colonization by European empires (Mosquera 2010, 198).

Dakar: Decolonization and Cultural Nationalism

World War II was the watershed period for the ending of British, French, and Dutch colonization of occupied territories. By 1966, most of the African continent was on the path to gaining independence. Vastly different from the Venice-Kassel model, the *Dak'Art* biennial emerged from Senegal's unique Pan-African congresses (conference discussions and meetings) and festivals (events that included the arts); as major contributions to decolonization aesthetics, these events constitute a key development of global expositions and art history in the global framework. From 1885 to 1960, Senegal was part of the colonial state of French West Africa, although because of its centrality to the transatlantic slave trade it had been occupied by European powers long before the nineteenth century. The remarkable era of Senegal's independence was led by Senghor, the charismatic statesman, philosopher, and poet who became the first president of the new Republic of Senegal in 1960 (Bâ 1973, 23). His administration's Pan-African congresses and festivals played an enormous role in the 1960s–1970s movement described by Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi as “a period of intense cultural nationalism and decolonization”; Nzewi states further that, the “festivals provided not only the setting for the celebration of black and African cultures, but also served as a reminder of black peoples' resilience over racism and colonialism” (Nzewi and Fillitz 2020, 6). The exhibition could function to express emancipation from the colonial past in a culturally nationalistic and celebratory way. The Pan-African events were held to emphasize emancipation from their European occupiers: The Congresses brought African leaders together to develop strategies for self-governance while the festivals celebrated African arts, literature, and music. Unlike the colonialist nationalism promoted by biennials/triennials and empire exhibitions, Pan-African nationalism was a form of reclamation, not only of the territory of the nation of Senegal but especially of the African arts and culture that was denigrated and suppressed by colonialism. Nothing illustrates this oppression more than the primitive–modern binary ascribed to African arts: The inscription of the “fetish,” anti-Christian Voodoo objects, seen also as grotesque “primitive” artifacts, was an invention by Europeans since the Enlightenment. From Kant to Hegel, the *modern* Western aesthetic, correlating beauty with Christian *freedom*, was defined by comparison with the *primitive* in their philosophies of art and history.⁸

The Pan-African coalition was led by Senghor, alongside Aimé Césaire from colonial Martinique and Léon-Gontran Damas from colonial French Guyana, who constituted the politico-philosophical-literary cohort who founded the anti-colonial *Négritude* movement in the 1930s, embracing Blackness and Africanness through the arts to counter the self-hatred and shaming instilled by racism and colonialism. According to Nzewi, Senghor had “transformed *Négritude* into a functional state ideology and the bedrock of his modernization agenda” and, in his first decade overseeing Senegal's independence, his cultural diplomacy culminated in “the successful staging of *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* (First World Festival of Negro Arts) in Dakar, in April 1966, which celebrated black cultural achievements and fortitude after many centuries of adversity” ((Nzewi and Fillitz 2020, 24). The artists, musicians, and poets who came to Dakar for the three-and-a-half-week festival included luminaries such as Josephine Baker, Duke Ellington, Langston Hughes, and Wole Soyinka (see Vincent 1966). *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* would eventually have profound effects on decolonizing processes, not only for the arts in West Africa but also for exhibitions of African art in France.

The 1989–1990 establishment of the *Dak'Art* biennial followed in the footsteps of the emancipatory ideal of the Pan-African festivals, now overseen by Senghor's protégé Abdou

Diouf, the technocrat economist who succeeded him as president of Senegal from 1981 to 2000. Dak'Art's 1990 debut celebrated Senghor's *Négritude* and was devoted to the literary arts, but the 1992 iteration was described as conventionally modeled from the Venice Biennale with artists participating not only from Africa but also from Europe, Asia, and the Americas. By 1996, however, Dak'Art established an unmistakable anti-colonial stance through a selection process directed toward artists "who recognize and accept their African origin," soliciting submissions by "artistes Africains et de la Diaspora" (Wictorin 2014, 565). Margareta Wallin Wictorin explains the development in which "artists from Africa and the diaspora are selected for the International Exhibition by a selection committee and a jury of curators. Artists of other origins can only take part in the so-called 'Off-exhibitions'" (Wictorin 2014, 565). This new jurying process, like none other in the European scope of organizing biennials and triennials, distinguishes Dak'Art as one of the most important art events for Africa's artists. And in relation to African artistic styles, "forms, ideas, and practices," Nzewi argues that Dak'Art's biennial itself informed a "specific understanding of contemporary African art, one that is part of what is now referred to as global contemporary" (Nzewi and Fillitz 2020, 133). He describes the modernist paintings on batik by Gambian artist Chuckley Vincent Secka and the stylized human faces emulating traditional African masks by the Senegalese artist Fode Camara as a kind of "postcolonial modernism" (Nzewi and Fillitz 2020, 133). The use of art to reflect the recuperation of an African canon while innovating and transforming African expression through formal and conceptual approaches was also made apparent by Dak'Art artists Moustapha Dime, Zerihun Yetmgeta, and Abdoulaye Konate, whose works were included in the 1992 exhibition.

Developing from this period of decolonial transition, Dak'Art had been conceived in 1989 by the Senegalese ministry of culture during the critical moment when communist socialisms were dramatically shifting with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Eastern Bloc. In that same year, the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition had debuted at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, a symbolic change to the representation of the "primitive cultures" that the French for so long had occupied and overlorded.⁹ Subsequently, French President Jacques Chirac adopted the Pan-African language when he initiated his *arts premiers* project in 2000, dedicating the new wing of the Louvre, the Pavillon des Sessions, to the "tribal arts." *Arts premiers* in the shadow of *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* was meant to replace the derogatory concepts such as "art negre, arts lointains, art tribal, arts exotiques, arts sauvages, arts primordiaux and art primitive" (Price 2007, 37).¹⁰ This history is one in which the Senegalese art initiatives since the 1970s were progressively influential to the way African art came to be represented in France, culminating in the 2006 opening of the Musée du Quai Branly museum in Paris. Quai Branly replaced the Musée de l'Homme, the museum that was the direct descendant of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, the anthropology museum built for the 1878 Exposition Universelle—showing a gradual, if not fully realized, shift away from categorizing non-European cultures as makers of only artifacts to the inclusion of their work with those objects made by European-founded (white upper-class) cultures deemed "art." The Pan-African exhibitions inspired by Senghor played an outsized role in the artistic self-determination that African creations were aesthetic rather than anthropological expression, and not until Chirac's *arts premiers* in the Louvre would African art finally fulfill the criteria for the elite category of "art."

The Anti-Capitalist and the New Capitalist Expositions in Havana and Guangzhou

The emancipatory potential of world expositions included their contradictory use by leaders of communist countries in both opposing and adopting industrial capitalism. Whereas documenta was designed to showcase artistic freedom after Hitler's "degenerate art," other nations have adopted the biennial/triennial program to tout an ideological internationalism.

Liberation aesthetics could be useful for communist regimes such as Cuba's, where the state culture ministry helped create the first Bial de La Habana in 1984, whereas, for independents in China, the opposite inchoate *capitalist* conditions provided a way to work around communist hardliners through the first Guangzhou Biennale in 1992. Curator Gerardo Mosquera, one of the founders in Cuba, clarifies:

the creation of the Bial was suggested by Fidel Castro himself, without his having a full idea of its implications. It was the last and most ambitious international cultural event focused on Latin America and the so-called Third World that was launched by Cuba, a country well-known for organising international conferences, symposia and congresses of every kind and in all fields as a way of publicising itself and building a good image (Mosquera 2011, 70).

Mosquera details the way in which the Cuban government rushed in to take advantage of Wifredo Lam's name when the artist died in 1982, giving rise to create the Bial as the central event for building "the Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam in Havana, with the mission to research and promote art produced in the so-called Third World" (Mosquera 2011, 71). As the son of a Black Cuban mother and a Chinese immigrant father, Lam was the ideal representative of the Cuban, multicultural, and artistic Third World, and Castro's aim was to establish Cuba as its leader. The first Bial de La Habana represented Latin American art solely but, by the 1986 edition, the exhibition developed into:

[a] mammoth, uneven, rather chaotic bunch of more than fifty exhibitions and events presenting 2,400 works by 690 artists from 57 countries ... never before had artists, curators, critics and scholars from so many places—Beirut, Brazzaville, Buenos Aires, Jakarta and Kingston, to name just a few ... What made this Bial historic was not its curating but its curatorial perspective (Mosquera 2011, 73).

Before the Bial, there were no international events around the visual arts in Cuba, and Mosquera acknowledged the country's political agenda that genuinely advocated for Latin American culture, an effort that was frequently in conflict with the Soviet Union's communism, an ideology that often clashed between Russian and Cuban cultural differences. By 1980, the USSR was winning the competition with China to curry favor with Cuba as the country became a full member of the Soviet bloc. Artists from China were not invited to the Bial de La Habana for this reason, even though the Centro de Arte Contemporaneo Wifredo Lam was meant to celebrate the Chinese-Cuban artist.

According to Mosquera, however, the first three biennials—1984, 1986, and 1989—succeeded in staging the "Third World art as a distinct, ontological category opposed to a 'Western art'" emphasizing "artistic and cultural differences, but within a shared, postcolonial practice of contemporary art" (Mosquera 2011, 74). The entire city of Havana would participate in the 1989 edition, offering a greater audience experience and artistic interaction for an event that actually lived up to the name of Cuban socialism: "a constellation of exhibitions and artistic, cultural and educational events organized by many museums, galleries, universities, houses of culture and community institutions throughout the whole city" (Mosquera 2011, 76). The liberation aesthetics of the Bial de La Habana were true to the socialist vision, a wholesale rejection of state-sponsored industrial capitalism. Unfortunately, by 1989, the limits of the Castro regime's tolerance for artistic freedom seemed to have been reached with the arrest of artist Angel Delgado for his performance art and the firing of the ministry officials deemed responsible, Marcia Leiseca and Beatriz Aulet. The message was conveyed to artists, and in the aftermath, many like Delgado would escape Cuba to attain greater artistic and personal freedom. Mosquera himself resigned immediately after the 1989 Bial, disillusioned with the increasing censorship and stagnant conservatism of the state (Mosquera 2011, 70).

In contrast, China's political landscape for contemporary art exhibitions and biennials can be mapped in relation to a nascent shift to a capitalist economy alongside the June 4, 1989 pro-democracy protests at Tiananmen Square. To this day, the official death toll remains unknown although activists recount hundreds to thousands in number who were brutally murdered by the tanks that rolled into square. The repression of expression was clear, but one of the first independent shows of contemporary art, the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition, had opened in Beijing on February 5, 1989, just months before the Tiananmen incident. According to Wu Hung, the show was a "triumphant moment of 'taking over' a primary official art institution. The National Art Gallery was transformed upon the opening of the exhibition" (Hung 2002, 84). Unfortunately, the military crackdown on June 4 was followed by martial law in the next year and stricter control of public events and exhibitions.

Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the 1980s instantiated the transition into a capitalist market economy that nonetheless created opportunities for the *dangdai yishu* experimental art movement. Lu Peng, the curator of the first biennial-type exhibition, suggests that the 1992 Guangzhou Biennale was "closer to an art fair than a biennial," noting how he had "received many criticisms for welcoming trade into the art world" (Peng 2013, 3–28).¹¹ Opposite the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition, the Guangzhou Biennale appears in China's history as the first "biennial," presenting "400 works by 350 artists ... supervised by an advisory committee formed by fourteen art critics" (Hung 2002, 84). But as Wu Hung went on to argue, "unlike any previous large-scale art shows this exhibition was sponsored by private entrepreneurs and with a self-professed goal of establishing a market system for contemporary Chinese art" (Hung 2002, 84). Peng claims their objective was to solicit the international art world, inviting *Flash Art* editor Francesco Bonami to come learn about "local Chinese contemporary art" displayed in "the Guangzhou Central Hotel in October 1992" (Peng 2013, 3). With the presentation of juried prizes set at enormous amounts of money (450,000 *yuan* or US\$120,000 which was an exorbitant amount at the time), Hung surmised that due to the "inexperience of the organizers as well as antagonism from the more idealistic artists, however, this grand undertaking ended with a feud between the three major parties involved in the exhibition: the organizers, the sponsor, and the artists" (Hung 2002, 84). The problematic nature of the exhibition diminished the Guangzhou Biennale's historical moment, colored by its flagrant capitalist representation.

Unlike the Bienal de La Habana, China's first biennial-like art fair was not state sponsored or even state sanctioned, and yet, the 1996 Shanghai Biennale and the 2002 Guangzhou Triennial would quickly become the state form for touting China's nationalism, following in the function of the old nineteenth-century exposition model (Peng and Sassone 2018). Mao Zedong's great anti-capitalist experiment drew to a close with the art fair in Guangzhou; since giving his 1942 *Talks at Yanan*, Mao had regulated the arts to serve in his anti-bourgeois socialist revolution. His Marxist rhetoric during his long rule, from 1949 to 1976, invigorated international Marxist intellectuals, from the French structuralist Louis Althusser to the French feminist cultural theorist Julia Kristeva. Exhibiting in authoritarian China in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the new class of independent artists whose works were now showcased in Guangzhou at the Central Hotel in October 1992 illustrated the end of the socialist art experiment.

Consequently, the inclusion of fourteen of China's contemporary artists in the 1993 Venice Biennale the following year created a different class of celebrity since they were considered the first contemporary artists from China to be represented in Venice's then hundred-year history. This international attention engendered the kind of cultural capital that would eventually garner Communist Party approval. To this end, the Shanghai Biennial was launched in 1996, many years before the Power Station of Art museum was built in 2012 to house it. This formula for building museums to accommodate the art exhibition was from the nineteenth-century nationalist playbook, exemplified by the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in the 1878 *Paris Exposition Universelle* and the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago's

1893 *World's Columbian Exposition*—both of which remained in their custom-built locations. As journalist Amy Qin reported, The Power Station of Art was “the first state-owned contemporary art museum in China,” and both the Power Station and the Shanghai Biennale were declared “landmark events” for the country (Qin 2014). Prefigured ultimately by the 1895 Venice Biennale model, this affirmation of the country’s money plus cultural capital was based on a version of European ideals for industrial empire. Qin concludes that the practice of art, once serving China’s anti-capitalist and socialist revolution, now functions to symbolize capital plus national status in the international context (Qin 2014).

Gwangju and Johannesburg—the Hard-Won Democracy Model for the Citizen’s Memorial

The 1995 Gwangju Biennale in South Korea emerged from political circumstances that parallel the democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, but with political outcomes that were the direct opposite of China’s continuing authoritarian rule. Following the 1979 assassination of the military dictator President Park Chung Hee, the South Korean people all over the country took to the streets to demonstrate on behalf of democracy. Not unlike China’s management of protest, the coup leader General Chun Doo-hwan deployed martial law in the aftermath. On May 18, 1980, the military assault on 200 student protesters in Gwangju set off a resistance by the city’s civilians. Their opposition to Chun led to a brutal massacre by the military with 190 deaths registered officially by the government while citizen groups counted upward of 2,000 deaths. But unlike the situation in China, here, the killings became the catalyst for nationwide protests resulting in the abdication of Chun in 1987. Gwangju became known for the bloody and deadly toll enacted by the state as South Korea’s sixth largest city turned into the symbol of the democratization of the country.

Haeran Shin argues that the formation of the Gwangju Biennale was “initiated by the central government and the local governments in their effort to transform the image of Gwangju from ‘the city of resistance’ to ‘the city of art’” (Shin 2004, 23). The attempt to change the negative history of violence through the positive light of the art exhibition was also a strategy for economic regeneration and urban development. Shin outlines the powerful civic groups that would fundamentally shape the message of the first Gwangju Biennale. The Gwangju Artist Community, for instance, simultaneously launched the Anti-Biennale at the Mangwol-dong cemetery location where victims of the May 18 massacre were buried, their graves eliciting an aura of grief for viewing artwork that expressed “a spirit critical of dictatorship, satire about social injustice, and hope for Korean reunification” (Shin 2004, 627). One of the most impactful works presented at this site was Korean artist Kimsooja’s installation *Sewing into Walking: Dedicated to the Victims of Kwangju*. She exhibited her signature bundles of clothing along the extended length of the road leading toward Mangwol-dong. The artist clarifies that the immense volume of 2.5 tons of clothes was meant to implicate the audience through their manifestations of the dead, “the image of the sacrificed bodies. People could walk on them, listening to the ‘Imagine’ song by John Lennon which, through the audiences’ bodies, evoked the confrontation of stepping on bodies and guilty conscience, as well as memorializing the victims’ lives” (Kimsooja cited in Turner and Webb 2016, 119; also see Shin 2004, 627). Because the Biennale was sited in Gwangju, the citizens kept the memory of their hard-won democracy alive for the next generation by recognizing those who died for it, those who were buried in the cemetery as well as those who remain unnamed.

Okwui Enwezor once identified himself as hailing from the optimism of “a generation of post-independence era in Nigeria in the 60s,” having emigrated to the United States in 1992 (Enwezor in Griffin 2008, 231). But his entry into the world of biennials as director of the Second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997 would debut in the very different

circumstances of South Africa, in the highly contentious conditions of the post-apartheid state. The first Johannesburg Biennale titled *Africus* commemorated the nation's first year of democracy in 1995. But 1997 would be remembered for the two public hearings held by the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Curator Natasha Becker, who grew up in the country, recounted her memories of 1997 and receiving long withheld information "about the abductions, killings, torture, and liberation movement, and individuals during 1960 to 1994" (Becker 2021, 14). Truth and reconciliation marked the necessary emotional and political reckoning coming out of the remarkable victory of Black South Africans in 1994, reclaiming political power after enduring three centuries of racist occupation. The apartheid regime is described by Becker as having instilled the separate "countries" of Johannesburg, "two indecipherable South Africas" where "people lived in two different realities, depending on one's history, geography, race, ethnicity, class, gender, culture, education, and opportunities" (Becker 2021, 19).

Because of the fraught social and political conditions, Enwezor's directorial strategy for the 1997 Johannesburg Biennial, entitled *Trade Routes: History and Geography*, was controversial from the outset, perhaps based in part on his founding premise: "I wanted to make an exhibition that took globalization as its point of departure, to argue that globalization actually started here, in South Africa" (Becker 1998, 88). Instead of addressing the end of apartheid, Enwezor's goal was to visualize history and the deeply conflicted development of South Africa's trade routes, to explore "how economic imperatives of the last 500 years have produced resilient cultural fusions and disjunctions ... how culture and space have been historically displaced through colonization, migration, and technology" (Becker 1998, 880). South Africa in Enwezor's framing is the locus of the colonial circulation of merchandise and artifacts, the site for mapping the global flow of art and culture. The irony of Enwezor's 1997 attempt to bring global representation to the longstanding global exhibitions was that, at the time, nothing could have been more distracting from the ongoing apartheid politics on the ground in Johannesburg. To realize his global thesis, Enwezor stated that:

[he] decided to invite curators from different parts of the world, and my only restriction for them was that it would not be nationally based. I want them to go beyond their own territorial proclivity. I invited Gerardo Mosquera from Cuba; Hou Hanru from China, who now lives in Paris; Yu Yeon Kim, based in Seoul and New York; Octavio Zaya from Spain, who has worked with European, Latin American and African artists and who lives in New York; Kellie Jones from the USA; and Colin Richards from South Africa, to be co-collaborators (Becker 1998, 880).

In turn, these collaborators selected over 160 artists from around the world (Bosland 2012, 18). But South Africa's fledgling democracy movement clearly needed Senghor's Pan-African form of empowerment because his *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres* showcase for African conferences and arts would have elevated African and diasporic identity for this decolonial moment in Johannesburg.

In his exhibition review of Enwezor's *Trade Routes* for *Art Monthly*, art historian Eddie Chambers mourned the way in which "black South Africans [were] brutally marginalised twice over: black South Africa, has, by and large, not been asked to participate in this Biennale and neither has black South Africa been addressed by this Biennale" (Chambers 1997/1998). Not holding back, Chambers suggests that the closest that the biennial came to representing Black South African art was:

in the form of Colin Richards, a white curator, writer and Senior Lecturer at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This point is important because the construction of this Biennale does nothing to interrupt the formidable set of cultural and political assumptions

that disempower Black South Africans, regarding them as culturally worthless and lacking intellectual ability. So Black South Africans, with aspirations to curate exhibitions see those aspirations denied and trampled upon (Chambers 1997/1998).

Richards, who died in 2012, reiterated in an interview his own doubts about Enwezor's choosing him: "At the time I thought it was either courageous or foolhardy for Okwui to choose a non-black, university-based curator. There were other options. At any rate taking on such a project would be risky" (Richards 2012, 48). Enwezor's expansive vision for the Johannesburg Biennale rejected the nineteenth-century organizing principles for conveying the colonialist and nationalist ideals of empire, designed to promote the host countries of the world's fairs. However, Senghor adopted those organizing principles on behalf of his *colonized* country during the moment of decolonization from France. He was able to reclaim those ideals for Senegal through his use of the *Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres*. The potential for the same kind of reclamation in South Africa ensued from the 1997 moment after apartheid; however, Enwezor sought instead to create a truly international exposition, addressing the global geography of colonization through curatorial collaborations that were meant to represent the interactions of cultures in the cultural hub of South Africa as the cultural hub. The place and the timing did not seem right. Nelson Mandela's activism while in prison, his agitating for Black South Africans to get out from under the apartheid oppression of white colonizers, was hard won (he was freed in 1990 and became president of the country from 1994 to 1999). The country's need to reckon with the *truth* of apartheid's racism supplanted the need for Enwezor's global *reconciliation*.

Okwui Enwezor's Platforms for the World Order of World Expositions

Nonetheless, Enwezor's impact on *European* and US global expositions is not to be overstated. My recent essay co-written with Alpesh Kantil Patel emphasizes Enwezor's contributions "reinventing the vocabulary for the 'use' of exhibitions in the writing of decoloniality in art history," we argue that he initiated the discourse "well before the terminology of the colonial/decolonial appeared in larger art-historical contexts" (Chin Davidson and Patel 2021, 7). We were paying tribute to Enwezor after his untimely death in our editorial for the 2021 special issue of *NKA, Journal of Contemporary African Art*, the journal he co-founded in 1994. We recognized the enduring changes that Enwezor forged for the structure of global exhibitions, notably, the innovative format of "Platforms" he created during his term as director of the 2002 documenta 11. Reminiscent of Cuba's Marxist intellectual model for international conferences, symposia, and congresses, as Enwezor described the Platforms, they consisted of:

conferences, debates, and workshops that preceded [the final documenta exhibition] in five locations: in Europe (Vienna and Berlin), Asia (New Delhi), the Americas (St. Lucia), and Africa (Lagos). Built into interlocking constellations of discursive domains, circuits of artistic and knowledge production, and research modules ... Documenta 11 was conceived not as an exhibition but as a constellation of public spheres. The public sphere of the exhibition gesture, implicit in the historical formation of Documenta, in which art comes to stand for models of representation and narratives of autonomous subjectivity, is rearticulated here as a new understanding in the domain of the discursive rather than the museological (Enwezor 2002, 54).

This shift away from viewing the international exhibition as a place for normalizing the political hegemony of artistic uniformity could be accomplished by literally moving the

show outside of the city hosting the exhibition, away from the museological center toward international “discourse” in order to foster, as Enwezor put it, “discursive potentialities of the engagement between artistic practice and social reality, theoretical reflection and political systems, forms-of-life and image economies, advanced technology and local industries”; such a dispersal “confronts us with a world of vast displacements and deterritorialized understanding of culture” (Enwezor 2002, 55). The discursive system was Enwezor’s new institutional vision for the global exhibition, and echoing Mosquera’s “constellation of public spheres,” he implemented a different model of contemporary art engagement that self-reflexively recognizes their political potential beyond art. This would become a challenge to the state-driven organizing principles perpetuated from the historical formation of global expositions, including the mandates of fascism and capitalism, which, as Alloway asserted, was correlative of a “classicizing and racist art theory” (Alloway 1968, 96).

When Enwezor opened the 2015 Venice Biennale, he presented a solemn and political show. *All the World’s Futures* was highlighted by live readings of *Das Kapital Oratorio*, “a massive, meticulously researched bibliographic project elaborated and directed by Isaac Julien” (Enwezor 2015, 19). This “oratorio” consisted of live performances by people reading from the three volumes of Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* every day, nonstop for seven months, providing a narrative backdrop for the whole of the exhibition. The year 2015 might now be remembered for the refugee crisis, when 1.3 million exiles (primarily from Syria) sought asylum in European countries. Overall, the mainstream media reported accurately on Enwezor’s show of works by 140 or so artists who focused on economic and political subjects relating to war, refugee exile, and environmental crisis as the outcomes of global capitalism. While most of the critics applauded the “reason why this Biennale is political—because it was time for it to be,” almost all of them included a caveat in which “many critics and art enthusiasts have expressed their disappointment in the show’s curation, while others claim it is just too hard, too difficult” (Heidenry 2015). Others voiced “it is a brutal exhibition. (If anyone tells you this was their favorite biennale, worry about their emotional state.) It is at times woefully heavy-handed and wildly uneven” (Russeth 2015). Perhaps the most honest was a review by Laura Cumming for the *Observer*, calling the fifty-sixth Venice Biennale:

more of a glum trudge than an exhilarating adventure. There’s an awful lot of fretting about the state of the world in the Biennale’s 88 national pavilions, but little power, wit or bravado ... [Enwezor,] purposefully featuring as many black artists as he can, includes strong mini-retrospectives by Ellen Gallagher, Lorna Simpson, Kerry James Marshall and Chris Ofili (Cumming 2015).¹²

What was striking about many of the reviews was this tone of patronizing disapproval that borders on xenophobia and racism. In the year before the election of a US president who sanctioned white supremacy, Enwezor completed the second part of his role as the first Black director of both documenta (in 2002) and the Venice Biennale of 2015. His profound legacy was to decolonize the two mainstream global expositions in Europe by confronting their audiences with the state of the world from which, by all appearances, they want to be insulated.

The 2022 Platform of documenta fifteen

At the 2002 Gwangju Biennale, ruangrupa had presented a performance artwork on the opening day of the thematic show titled *P_A_U_S_E*, in which a table of food was offered to visitors in the exhibition space; following the feast, the leftover dishes were to be viewed as a conceptual work. This art installation provided respite from the tensions of contemporary

life and encouraged meditation and reflection; from the perspective of many Asian cultures, enjoying a meal together plays a primary role in this aim. *P_A_U_S_E* literally answers the question posed as an important Asian form of etiquette, “Have you eaten yet?”

Founded in 2000 by Ade Darmawan, Hafiz, Lilia Nursita, Oky Arfie, Rithmi, Ronny Agustinus, and Ade Tanesia, ruangrupa’s collective emerged from the social and political conditions of Jakarta and Indonesia, political transitions that share parallels with Gwangju’s in the 1990s. The 1998 resignation of Indonesia’s president Suharto after thirty-two years in power was largely attributed to the three months of student-led protests, resulting in 500 dead and culminating in the occupation of parliament by thousands of student protesters. Suharto had himself taken command in 1965 from his position as top general in the army by blaming the Indonesian Communist Party for the coup attempt on Indonesia’s founding leader Sukarno. The crackdown prompted the persecution and massacre of millions of suspected “communists” by Suharto’s regime, which he called the “New Order.” According to Thushara Dibley and Michele Ford:

Suharto had destroyed the vibrant social movement landscape dominated by the Left ... The government achieved a more or less complete demobilization of society in the few short years between 1971 and 1975, reordering the political system and entrenching a series of “functional groups” for workers, peasants, fishers, youth, and women to contain the participation of constituencies formerly represented by independent social movements (Dibley and Ford 2019, 7).

Notwithstanding the repressions of Suharto’s regime, the next thirty years in Indonesia saw a fragmentary mobilization of informal networks of small groups, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and action committees working largely underground until 1989 when *keterbukaan* (openness) brought a sustained frequency of demonstrations that educated the public about practices of democracy. The persistence of activists, including the artist’s collective Taring Padi (translated loosely to mean “fangs of rice”) located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, were highly influential to the success of the 1998 deposing of Suharto and the ongoing reform in the aftermath.

As a predecessor to ruangrupa, Taring Padi was one of the many artist collectives from around the world included in documenta fifteen. They exhibited a prolific archive of over a hundred objects once used to “organize, educate, agitate” in mobilizing protests through workshops, not just in Indonesia but in solidarity with migrants, street artist groups, and schools in Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia (ruangrupa 2022a, 193). At documenta, the vibrant woodcut posters, large banners measuring eight meters wide, and *wayang kardu* life-sized cardboard puppets were presented mostly in the Hallenbad Ost, the Bauhaus style building built in 1929.

Not even a week after documenta fifteen officially opened, Taring Padi’s sixty-foot banner from 2002, *People’s Justice*, was censored by the documenta administrators, who determined its content was “antisemitic,” resulting in the covering up of the enormous installation with black draping that evoked a work of mourning (Figure 34.1). Much like Taring Padi’s other banners (Figure 34.2), the 2002 work was packed with hundreds of exaggerated caricatures criticizing General Suharto’s brutal dictatorship in the aftermath of his resignation in 1998. But allegations made largely by “a fringe Zionist blog” led Claudia Roth, Germany’s culture minister, and members of the Israeli embassy in Germany, to interpret two of the characters to be “reminiscent of the propaganda of Goebbels and his henchmen in dark times of German history,” they viewed “a pig wearing a helmet with the word ‘Mossad,’ the national intelligence agency of Israel, and a Star of David; another donning fangs, a black hat with a Nazi emblem, and the sidelocks often worn by Orthodox Jewish individuals” (Liu and Liscia 2022). The Taring Padi artists issued an apology and took ownership while defending their expression: “all of the figures depicted on the banner refer



FIGURE 34.1 Taring Padi, *People's Justice*, banner (60 feet), 2002. “Monument of Mourning” June 20, 2022, covered by documenta organizers after censorship by German administration. Photo courtesy of Taring Padi.



FIGURE 34.2 Taring Padi, *Sekarang Mereka, Besok Kita* (Today They Come for Them, Tomorrow They Come for Us), 2021, acrylic on canvas (8 × 8 feet). David Davidson (Author).

to symbolism that is widespread in Indonesia's political context, e.g. for the corrupt administration, the military generals and their soldiers, who are symbolized as pigs, dogs and rats to criticize an exploitative capitalist system and military violence" (Liu and Liscia 2022).¹³ Still, the entire installation was eventually taken down. In mid-September charges of anti-semitism were also made against the Subversive Film Collective, with an attempt to censure their Tokyo Reels Film Festival (TRFF) and their showing of documentary footage of the exodus by Palestinians to Beirut during the 1982 Lebanon War. Having lived in Lebanon for years, the experimental filmmaker Masao Adachi's viewpoint was overtly pro-Palestinian, he was also a former member of a militant communist organization called the Japanese Red Army. documenta's supervisory board published their objections in a statement: "We reject both the poison of antisemitism and its current instrumentalization, which is being done to deflect criticism of the 21st-century Israeli state and its occupation of Palestinian territory."¹⁴ As a result of these political tensions, artists withdrew from the exhibition because the coverage by the mainstream news media inflamed the allegations and excoriated ruangrupa's efforts (Liscia 2022). The *Washington Post* critic declared:

[We had] come for the art—but after two days of being harangued with every national flavor of far-left rhetoric, we struggled to remember even a dozen truly impressive works we'd seen ... On the other hand, the uncomfortable feeling of being shouted at, talked at, whispered at, sometimes openly mocked was likely the curators' objective. That a distinctly non-Western brand of Jew-hatred was part of it wasn't really an accident ... When you turn the keys over to the non-Western world, with parlous art collectives distributing an enormous government grant among themselves in a kind of collective farm process, you get that and more; what you don't get is awe before Western culture, or even respect for Western creativity, such as it is these days. You're simply told that it's no longer your turn to talk (Bershidsky 2022).

Clearly, this opinion writer is emboldened to voice his colonialist judgment through a worn-out "us and them" authorization of art, the implicit demand for "awe before Western culture" extends from the long history of violence by "the West" that ironically had one of its earliest origins in the Indonesian archipelago, where, beginning in around 1600, the Dutch East Indies Trading Company (the VOC) inflicted 200 years of slavery and pillaging on the Indonesian people, resources, and territory. Worst of all, the capitalist-colonialist occupation of the region was inextricably connected to the construction of the Dutch East Indies territory as the VOC capitalist proprietors set the modern precedence for establishing the norm of the occupied nation state. Dutch colonization did not end until WWII with the Japanese takeover and subsequent surrender of Indonesia in 1945, which led to Sukarno's rule and the Indonesian War of Independence; decolonization succeeded in 1949.

In 2019, ruangrupa's Ade Darmawan raised the historical issues in an interview for *The Jakarta Post* when they had just learned of their acceptance to be documenta's curators:

If Documenta was launched in 1955 to heal war wounds, why shouldn't we focus Documenta 15 on today's injuries, especially ones rooted in colonialism, capitalism or patriarchal structures, and contrast them with partnership-based models that enable people to have a different view of the world? (Amirio 2019).

It seems that documenta's newly discovered connections to Naziism are completely neutralized, made acceptable by the so-called antisemitism of ruangrupa and Taring Padi's "non-Western world." In September 2022, ruangrupa published a final letter from the Lumbung Community in which they wrote:

We know what it means to be discriminated against due to color, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, origin, caste, and/or disability. We understand the ways that our different anti-colonial struggles intersect. And that these struggles are faced in everyday life in society at large. We are committed to art's role in resisting these broader societal injustices. And in the context of documenta fifteen and the specificities of the German context we see that the targeting of Palestinian artists is the point at which our anti-colonial struggles meet, and have become a focal point for attack. Anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-queer, transphobia, anti-Roma, ableism, casteism, anti-black, xenophobia and other forms of racisms are racisms that the German society must deal with in addition to antisemitism. (ruangrupa 2022b)

In the end, ruangrupa will have contributed to the anti-colonialist challenge that Enwezor thought was possible through collectively organized ideas; thus, ruangrupa added to the emancipation aesthetics in the legacy of Senghor's Pan-African festivals, in the trajectory of the Bienal de La Habana multicultural "Third Word" constellations, and in the liberation ideals of the Gwangju Biennale.

ruangrupa's documenta showcased a clear contrast from the Venice Biennale's nineteenth-century norm for displaying nationalist/capitalist/industrial power, and it is important to at least outline one of their most effective curatorial inclusions. The Haitian collective Atis Rezistans fulfilled ruangrupa's curatorial approach, to create "a different kind of collaborative model of resource use—in economic terms but also with regard to ideas, knowledge, programs and innovations."¹⁵ ruangrupa's implementation of the curatorial *collective* reveals the tremendous opportunity to break from a colonialist practice designed for an exposition model rooted in empire. In 2009, Atis Rezistans artists hosted the first Ghetto Biennale at their Grand Rue neighborhood in downtown Port-au-Prince, with the aim of expanding "the role of Haiti in the global history of Black revolution and liberation."¹⁶ At documenta, no space could be more meaningful for housing their collection of works from different editions of the Ghetto Biennale than St. Kunigundis Church, the abandoned Roman Catholic church built in 1927 had survived WWII without damage. Atis Rezistans inhabited the church interior and exterior with Vodou cosmology and the spiritual worlds of Haiti.¹⁷

Installed next to the statue of the Virgin Mary in the side chapel of St. Kunigundis's entrance hall, Michel Lafleur and Tom Bogaert's colorful artwork titled *Famasi Mobil Kongolè* (Figure 34.3) symbolizes the historical nexus between Vodou and Catholicism. Their installation of four sculptural works were made to look like the mobile pharmacies carried by street vendors who offer "spires of curved paper covered with pills—painkillers, antibiotics, Viagra knockoffs, condoms, abortion pills and cough syrups" (Rezistans 2022). The reference to healing and the Virgin is apparent, but in contrast, the Catholic cult of Mary also played a significant role in the country's intense and violent history of colonization and slavery, from the Spanish colonial rule of what was then called Hispaniola (1492–1697) to Catholicism's greater influence during the French colonial rule of Saint-Domingue (1697–1804). As such, the spiritual tradition of Vodou has been traced to the syncretism of Yoruba deities and Catholic saints. According to Leslie Desmangles, "once adopted by the oppressed slaves, the Virgin became syncretized with the African goddess Ezili, the Vodou *Iwa* (spirit) who eventually became an emblem of resistance against slavery throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century" (Desmangles 2001, 44). Through the haunting of Vodou symbolism, the Catholic symbol of oppressive power was co-opted by the descendants of the oppressed to serve as an emblem of resistance. Likewise, the Ghetto Biennale's occupation of St. Kunigundis Church functions as a metaphor for the possibility of change in colonialist and nationalist relations of power that global exhibitions continue to serve.

In conclusion, the Sharjah Biennial 15 is scheduled for 2023 to unveil Okwui Enwezor's final curatorial project posthumously. The Sharjah Foundation published the title *Thinking Historically in the Present* to announce Enwezor's objective:



FIGURE 34.3 Michel Lafleur and Tom Bogaert, *Famasi Mobil Kongolè*, 2019–2022 (80 × 60 × 40 centimeters) (blue)—(150 × 60 × 30 centimeters) (Yellow) (70 × 40 × 40 centimeters) (red)—(180 × 50 × 30 centimeters) (white) electric lights, Congo blue filter sheets, hand painted cardboard, plastic buckets, multicolored pills, rubber bands and pairs of scissors. Installed in the side chapel of entrance hall in St. Kunigundis church. David Davidson (Author).

For Enwezor, the contemporary art exhibition provided a means to engage with history, politics and society in our global present. He envisioned the invitation to curate this edition of Sharjah Biennial as a way to reflect on and contribute to the Biennial's history and that of the overarching Foundation, and their role in addressing the need for institutional models outside of the West that support dialogue and the production and presentation of contemporary art responsive to our times.¹⁸

Enwezor was hopeful about biennials and triennials because Senghor's Pan-African festivals and his emancipation aesthetics foresaw the anti-colonial processes for future generations of global exhibitions and ultimately helped to develop the new perspectives, practices, histories, philosophies, and ideals for contemporary art in today's global framework.

Notes

- 1 The curators Maria de Corral and Rosa Martinez were the first women directors of the Venice Biennale, and in their 2005 Fifty-First edition, Barbara Kruger was awarded the Golden Lion and works of The Guerrilla Girls were the monumental feminist representations.

- 2 See the documenta 15 website <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung>.
- 3 See https://www.documenta.de/en/about#16_documenta_ggmbh, accessed on November 20, 2022.
- 4 See <https://www.dhm.de/en/press/press-release/documenta-politics-and-art-18-june-2021-to-9-january-2022-1>, accessed on November 17, 2022.
- 5 Also see: <https://www.dhm.de/en/exhibitions/archive/2021/documenta-politics-and-art/more-story>, accessed on November 17, 2022.
- 6 NSDAP refers to the National Socialist German Workers' Party (German: Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, a far-right political party in Germany active between 1920 and 1945; SA refers literally to "Storm Detachment"), which was the original paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party; The SS refers to Schutzstaffel, a major paramilitary organization under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party.
- 7 Yoshimoto suggests the consensus was that Expo 70 offered "a mere rehashing of Gutai's past works, dismissing them in favor of Gutai's early performances, installations," and that Jirō was more concerned with Gutai's role in the international art world.
- 8 The books that outline the oppression of African art by Enlightenment thinkers begin with Kant (1960) and end with Hegel (1991).
- 9 It should be noted that the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition was criticized for its paternalistic approach, among other criticisms, and the curator Jean-Hubert Martin was an anthropologist not an art specialist. See Lamoureux (2005).
- 10 These terms were presented in the analysis of the show by Price (2007, 37); also see Chin Davidson (2018).
- 11 The first Guangzhou Biennial was sometimes called *Oil Painting in the Nineties*.
- 12 See also, Adrian Searle, "Venice Biennale: the world is more than enough," *The Guardian* (11 May 2015) <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/11/venice-biennale-all-the-worlds-futures-review> [accessed 11/21/22].
- 13 ruangrupa also issued an apology in an interview with Kate Brown (2022).
- 14 See the Statement of the Finding Committee, available at: <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/press-releases/the-statement-of-finding-committee>, accessed on July 1, 2023.
- 15 Published on the documenta 15 website, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/about>, accessed on July 1, 2023.
- 16 The core group of Atis Rezistans artists included Andre Eugene, Jean Claude Saintilus (known as Kaliko, Jean Robert Palanquet (Ti Jean), Evel Romain, Wesner Bazile, and Riko. See ruangrupa (2022, 66).
- 17 The exterior of the church was emblemized by enormous crosses constructed from recycled oil drums next to the car-parts statue of Papa Legba, the historical West African king reconfigured with the Catholic saints Peter, Lazarus, and Anthony to become the Vodou spirit who serves as intermediary between spiritual and human worlds.
- 18 Sharjah Biennial 15: Thinking Historically in the Present—7 February to 11 June 2023, <https://www.sharjahart.org/biennial-15>, accessed on November 21, 2022.

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CURATING

In Residence, Incarcerated: Regina José Galindo's *America's Family Prison*

Andy Campbell

Artist residencies are an institutional model of art production responsible, in part, for the transnational circulation of artists and their work. That such residencies both produce and are produced by international geopolitics must be sited within a larger discussion of the mechanics of curatorial practice—especially because residency programs have widely variable curatorial structures. To highlight this entanglement among artist, institution, and curator, I will be focusing here on the set of circumstances that brought Guatemalan performance artist Regina José Galindo to Artpace's International Artist-In-Residence program in San Antonio, Texas. The work she developed while in residence during Summer 2008 provides an opportunity to consider the limitations and power relationships inherent in many artist residencies by situating them in proximity to the carceral conditions that Galindo, in fact, highlights in her work, thereby exposing these relations to view.

Invited to the Artpace residency by guest curator Franklin Sirmans (who was at the time curator of modern and contemporary art at the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas) Galindo's performance, entitled *America's Family Prison*, involved incarcerating herself, her husband, and their child in a rented mobile prison unit for twenty-four hours, overlapping with the exhibition's opening night.¹ She realized this work during a staggering peak in US incarceration rates, and as new forms of detention were being pioneered for asylum seekers, specifically the growth of privately run family detention facilities such as the T. Don Hutto Residential Center (formerly known as T. Don Hutto Correctional Facility) in Taylor, Texas—only two hours' drive northeast of Artpace.² When exhibited today, *America's Family Prison* exists as mediated documentation, an hour-long video of accelerated surveillance footage of the Galindo family's time and activities in the cell.

Galindo's performance critically engaged the particularities of her temporal and geographical (dis)placement—as I'll describe, this is one of the hallmarks of artist residency programs—but also implicitly pressurized the ideological positioning of residency institutions, and, to a certain extent, curatorial practice writ large. In producing an artwork referencing the for-profit prison industrial complex within the context of a non-profit artist residency program in the United States, Galindo's work reroutes the procedures governing

state-sanctioned temporary workers—like those applied to international artists participating in such programs—by highlighting the deep asymmetries of US immigration policy and practice. If, as we are often reminded in texts about curatorial practice, the term *curate* itself (coming from the Latin *curare*) suggests “care” as the ideological heart of curatorial work, *America’s Family Prison* forges an alternate vision. Galindo’s project highlights how residencies and their curators rely upon the displacement and temporary delimitation of a participating artist’s movements as a precursor for creative productivity; this is especially evident within Artpace’s model, where curators, who share a similar status to artists as temporary workers, are distinctly *not* in residence.

Artpace’s model relies upon salaried staff to identify guest curators (independent or institutionally affiliated elsewhere), who, in turn, choose three artists at different geographical scales—local/regional, national, and international. The chosen artists are invited to take up residence at the institution in a small cluster of apartments located in the building. While in residence they are expected to produce new work for a single-room culminating exhibition, an event that also marks the end of their residency. As hinted earlier, while the artists are required to be in residence, the guest curators are not. Their curatorial labor is primarily focused upon the completion of three tasks: the initial selection of artists; the curator’s ongoing conversations (limited or robust) with the artists, aiding in the conceptual or practical development of the new artwork; and the completion of three short essays addressing the work created by each artist. Unlike other residencies that might have an in-house curator/curatorial department, or that otherwise split up curatorial duties among an array of staff positions, Artpace utilizes an ever-changing roster of extrinsic curators who by default are the most mobile workers during the residency period, in this particular triangulation of organization, artist, and curator.

I should admit before going any further here that I am caught up in this system, too; I am drafting this text while serving as the guest curator for the Summer 2022 round of artists’ residencies at Artpace. As an institutionally affiliated scholar who also works as an independent curator, I consider part of my curatorial work to involve the researching and engagement of the histories of the institutions with which I work. Sometimes the fruits of this research come out in a public program or publication (such as this), or sometimes they simply add to my understanding of the business of meaning-making within a particular context. Either way, I am directly implicated in the argument I make here about curatorial practices and their relation to carceral logics. Just as Galindo’s work places the conditions of residency and detainment near one another, so too will this chapter seek to operate through adjacencies, limning out histories of artists residencies, migration policies, and an analysis of the triangulation of artist, curator, and institution.

In Residence

Although they play an important role in the complex institutional ecosystem producing and exhibiting art, there is not yet a holistic history of artists’ residencies as specific and dedicated institutions temporarily supplementing, and sometimes supplanting, other spaces in which artists might make work—such as an artist’s studio. In place of that project, which would handily surpass the scope of a chapter such as this, I want to sketch the outlines that such a history might cover, listing some of its key institutions in Europe and North America.

Artist residencies must be understood as being indebted to a range of art institutions such as academies and schools (largely in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) as well as global exhibitions/festivals and artist colonies (both from the mid-nineteenth century onward). In Europe, rural locales some distance from putative art centers—for example, the forests blanketing the Barbizon area 60 kilometers from Paris—played host to an ever-fluctuating number of artists in the 1800s. These seasonal and yearly gatherings of

self-selected artists, sometimes sustained over the course of generations, were prototypical of the US idiom of the form, which was cemented by early twentieth-century artist colonies in the rural Northeast: Byrdcliffe (New York), Yaddo (New York), and MacDowell (New Hampshire). In each of these cases artists would spend a loosely defined amount of time on the premises to pursue “seclusion, serenity, and communion with nature” (Heartney et al. 2003, 11). Relying on Enlightenment conceptions of the restorative power of nature, specifically nature’s capacity to revive one’s mental and/or physical health, these colonies were not usually permanent residences for those who sought their benefits but temporary destinations. Institutions of the 1930s and 1940s such as Banff School of Fine Arts (Alberta, Canada), Black Mountain College (North Carolina), and Skowhegan (Maine) carried more explicitly pedagogical aims—defining themselves in terms of schooling. Therefore, they often had more focused aims in terms of artistic production, even if these aims were experimental. Perhaps the most influential of such programs after mid-century were the residencies developed by the Studio Museum in Harlem (Manhattan) in 1968 and the WorkSpace program at PS1 (Queens) in 1971, now known as the National and International Studio Program. Both were attached to newly constituted art institutions in New York City’s boroughs, and each had a general mission of giving institutional support to underrecognized artists. Each was also conceptualized as working in tandem with an extrinsic and broader program of curator-driven exhibitions and educational initiatives. Several art residencies founded in the 1980s and 1990s—such as the Headlands Center for the Arts (Sausalito, California, 1982), Akademie Schloss Solitude (Stuttgart, Germany, 1990), the ARCUS Artist-in-Residence Program in Moriya, Japan (Moriya, Japan, 1994–2018), and Artpace (San Antonio, Texas, 1995)—broke with this model, offering invited artists housing as well as the financial resources to spend on the production of new work, sometimes with the expectation that whatever was produced would be exhibited on-site (and thereafter credited). From the 1990s until now the form has expanded in myriad ways—residencies can now be nomadic (Caribic Residency, founded in 2008), remote (Lenka Clayton’s ingenious Artist Residency in Motherhood, in 2012), and/or originating in institutions not primarily dedicated to art such as the residency architected by artist Charles Lindsay and astronomer Jill Tarter at SETI Institute, an organization dedicated to searching for extraterrestrial life in the universe in 2010.

Even in the aforementioned brief history of residency programs, the keen reader will note the array of differences among these examples, suggesting a taxonomic fuzziness as to what, exactly, constitutes an artist residency program. Indeed, there is broad variability across many factors including but not limited to: an institution’s focus, objectives, and cohesion, as well as its capacities and expectations for on-site exhibitions of residents’ work after their residency period has ended. But the one foundational principle nearly all these share is a reliance on a geographic displacement of artists from their home(s) or usual place(s) of residence.

Most of these residencies do not have full-time, dedicated curatorial staff, but instead rely upon ever-changing juries of curators, artists, and other organizational stakeholders to discern which artists will be selected from a pool of applicants. Organization staff—program directors, facilities managers, educators, and communications professionals—are therefore responsible for the day-to-day operations of the residency, including the institutional wrangling and artist-focused tasks that might otherwise fall to curatorial staff: development and allocation of budgets, spatial planning, programming, and writing/speaking about any given work or group of works.

Returning to geographic displacement, this defining feature is key to the challenge artist residencies have offered, historically and today, to participants who want to break away from centuries-old, early modern understandings of the artist’s workshop/studio—supplanting the workshop/studio is the locus of artistic activity and curatorial interface, and insisting, instead, that artists *bring their studios to institutions*. This shift in the circuits of

art's production underscores broader conceptual shifts regarding the position of the artist as peripatetic and post-studio. Michael Haerdter, the first president of Res Artis—a networking organization for residential art centers and artist residencies—sums up the historical necessity of such institutions in supporting work that had yet to find purchase in the mainstream institutions of art:

The new artist, the newcomer in the arts, is a man or a woman in the international scene, the international world, working as an interventionist ...: for art *in situ*, for *arte povera*, for performance art, for installation art, of course—all these new ideas at the time. And the idea of interactive, cross-border working ... and mobility—the artist moves around the world, this was an important basis for the development of artist residencies (Haerdter 2018).

The “interventionist” and “nomadic” status of the artist here—a person assumed to be amenable to being uprooted from their daily life, and who will be expected to be productive under such conditions—has been historically undergirded by patriarchal biases, as men were not generally beholden to the otherwise feminized tasks of raising children and/or providing direct, daily care for family members. Such visions of a “nomadic elite,” as surmised by Carol Becker, conflict with “the disenfranchised poor who travel because they are desperate to improve their conditions” (Becker 1999, 27). And it is this very distinction that Galindo's performance for Artpace troubles by situating herself and her family as detainees.

Technically, international artist residencies are possible because of the construction, maintenance, and mutation of a broader governmental apparatuses allowing for guest worker visas. While these vary internationally, the guest worker program in the United States is worth understanding in some depth to give historical context to the mechanisms whereby international artists, curators, and other cultural workers are permitted to live temporarily in residence in the United States—the most basic requirement for most artist residencies. Guest worker visas were prototyped, in part, on the Bracero Program, which accepted over four million temporary agricultural workers from Mexico over the years of the program's existence (1942–1964), powering the agricultural production of the Southwest United States. Less than a decade after the end of World War II, and undergirded by anti-communist/anti-Semitic rhetoric, the US Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which authorized a new nonimmigrant visa category, the H-2 Visa, designating the subcategories H-2A for agricultural workers and H-2B for all others. In the decades since new subcategories have been legislated and put into place—the J-1 visa, for example, is the product of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, existing to “increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange.” Importantly the J-1 visa was to be administered by the US Information Agency (USIA) and not the (then single) agency dedicated to immigration, marking out a space for educational and cultural workers—scholars, professors, trainers/trainees—who were given exception from the purview of immigration authorities. These divisions are important to understand because they articulate difference at the bureaucratic level, between the guest worker and the migrant or asylum-seeker—which I will focus on in the second half of this essay.

The Q-1 visa, which was obtained to bring Regina José Galindo to Artpace in 2008, was a program established in 1982 responding to perceived lapses in the oversight of the J-1 visa program, specifically relating to potential visa holders' employment at theme parks (Johnson 2012, 922). It was Disney—a for-profit media and entertainment conglomerate—that picked up on this lacuna in congressional intention and proposed the new category of visa, for a temporary cultural worker whose role was to share the “history, culture, and traditions of the country of the alien's nationality” (Johnson 2012, 922). Unlike the J-1 visa, the cultural transactions of the Q-1 are framed in an almost ambassadorial way. It is no coincidence that at the time Disney was opening EPCOT Center in Orlando, Florida, stylized to

exist as a permanent world's fair. Likely a cost-cutting measure, Disney hoped to staff EPCOT's eleven pavilions with workers from the represented countries. Just as Galindo's performance offers a challenge to the notion of being "in residence" by situating herself proximate to structures of incarceration, *America's Family Prison* also offers a substantive subversion of the stated internationalist ideals of the Q-1/ "Disney" visa program: instead of appearing as an ambassador for Guatemala's history and culture, Galindo's performance and video reverses the engagement by illuminating the privatized brutalities of refugee family detention within the United States.

In an era defined by an ever accelerating global neoliberalism, residencies for non-US citizens come to implicitly and explicitly replace the meager efforts of national, state, and local governments to support artists and those institutions dedicated to artists, serving as proxies for a much wider, state-sanctioned project of intercultural/international exchange.³ This can be seen in contrast to "fellowship" programs such as the Fulbright Program, which is administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs under the Department of State. In other words, artist residencies form a key component of how the nonimmigrant, temporary residency of artists and of curators is situated within the United States.⁴

And this situation is not unequivocally progressive, nor necessarily to the benefit of artists' livelihoods. David Hodge and Hamed Yousefi, cognizant of the absence of governmental infrastructure for art, argue that "residency culture exemplifies a general trend within the international scene toward the internalization of precarity, opportunism, and especially individualization into art practice" (Hodge and Yousefi 2015). Curators and adjudicators of residency programs must understand their actions within this frame, as participants in an intensifying neoliberal system established on precarity—and the prestige of residency programs aids in occluding this fact, presenting awarded residencies only as professional achievements. Within the residency format, commitments to artists (in terms of provided housing and/or studio space and/or materials and/or money) are only ever temporary, and ultimately reserved for a limited number of recipients who can articulate such need vis-à-vis the intersection of their individuated art practice and the broader goals of the granting institution. By contrast, individual curatorial interlocutors for residency programs, in this case Franklin Sirmans, are usually not required to be in residence, and may only be present for an initial visit, an exhibition's opening, and/or an additional program. Still, there is an important role that a curator or jury plays in selecting artists who might be likely to be self-reflexive about these conditions within their projects. Sirmans, for example, chose a cohort of artists—Galindo, Margarita Cabrera, and Rodney McMillian—for whom power relations and resistance is a unifying attribute. One of the unique features of Artpace is its charge to curators to produce short essays addressing each artist's project and practice, an aspect that makes curatorial framing apparent. In the context of jury-driven artist residencies such motives may be more opaque. Artpace's commitment to fostering the discourse around any given artist's work distinguishes its program from most other residencies, ideally fostering a closer relationship between artist and curator in the development (or, at the very least, interpretation) of the work.

In the best-case scenario the potential drawbacks described earlier are counterbalanced by more immaterial benefits for artists: the possibility of deepening or expanding one's artistic practice and the instantiation of networked relationships with other artists and curators (who might then program them into other exhibitions and feeding a notion of an artist's incipient "celebrity").⁵ In fact, this latter benefit was accorded to Galindo, whose work was also programmed into Sirmans's group exhibition *NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*, an exhibition that examined spirituality and ritual in contemporary art (see Sirmans 2008). The residency is therefore understood as a temporal, ideological, and geographic zone of exception from artists' daily lives and realities but also as a networked stepping stone for wider recognition and dissemination of their art.

Understanding these histories of artist residencies and the conditions governing the travel of temporary, nonimmigrant cultural workers in the United States, Artpace continues to exist as an

innovative model of an artist residency program.⁶ ArtPace (as the institution's name was initially stylized) features triannual rotating "rounds," each composed of three artists: one from Texas; one from elsewhere in the United States; and one from outside of the country. Certain cases (potential, virtual) such as artists from US unincorporated (read: colonial) territories like Guam and Puerto Rico, as well as indigenous artists, do not neatly fit into this scaled schematic of territorial governance or sovereignty, a schematic left to the curator of each round to parse. In the first years of Artpace's existence these cohorts would be assembled by a small group of "curators, artists, and museum directors," on a bi-annual basis (Pace and Russell 2015, 57). During this period of Artpace's existence, once a year an individual curator would be tapped to choose the artists of a single round. Such was the case for Artpace's opening round of artists in the Spring of 1995, which was comprised of the artists Jesse Amado, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Annette Messenger (representing the local, national, and international, respectively), all chosen by Robert Storr, curator in painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York at the time. In tapping Storr, Artpace signaled its capacity to attract curators whose participation in a loose international system of exhibitions—and sometimes this moment in the 1990s and 2000s is referred to as the biennialization of art and exhibitions—confirmed them as arbiters of then-current "globalized" art networks. By 2002, and in line with a popular rising sentiment of curators as creative auteurs, Artpace streamlined their curatorial model by leaving behind the notion of the curatorial jury. In addition to Sirmans, Artpace selected Lauri Firstenberg, the founder and then-curator at LAXART in Los Angeles, CA, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, who was working at the Serpentine Gallery in London at the time, as the curators for the remaining rounds in 2008, neatly mirroring the local, national, and international categorizations for artists, respectively. Similar to the notion of "globalized" art networks referred to earlier, this structure did not (and does not) necessarily imply a heterogeneity in curatorial *or* artistic approach to an historically European gallery/museum structure of display, nor did it mandate coverage from particular areas (the Global South, Africa, and the Arctic, just to name a few) that have long been neglected by that same Eurocentric worldview.

Incarcerated

Early in her residency period Galindo spoke with Riley Robinson, then studio director (at the time of writing, he is now Artpace's director), about developing an installation and performance inspired by the architecture and practice of state-ordered executions in Texas. In the Artpace archives there exists a sketch of what this installation was to look like: a wall and glass partition installed at the back of one of Artpace's cavernous galleries with rows of seating arranged in front—an approximation of the death chamber in the Huntsville Unit, where all death row prisoners in Texas are executed. For the performance on opening day Galindo was to be placed on a gurney behind the glass and sedated with the first of three shots used by the state of Texas according to their lethal injection schedule, the state-sanctioned method of execution used since 1977, following the discontinuation of death by electric chair, and public hanging before that. Although the component of the injection Galindo was to be subjected to would only sedate her, no doctor could be identified willing to participate in the performance. At the time the eighteen state-ordered executions in Texas accounted for nearly 50% of all such procedures nationwide; and no other state executed more than four individuals per annum (see Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty 2008, 1). Galindo's proposed performance bears some resemblance to earlier works by the artist such as *valium 10ml.* (2000), in which she was sedated in a gallery at the Museo Ixchel in Guatemala City.

During her time in residence, Galindo also completed an altogether different work, which did not wind up going on display. This was a performance for video entitled *Let's Rodeo* (2008). The work is comprised of video footage of the artist attempting to ride a rented

mechanical bull for ninety minutes, growing ever more exhausted by the effort. In the video, Galindo is thrown, over and over again, from the spinning, bucking mechanical bronc, landing each time with a percussive *thud* onto a mat resembling a giant Texas state flag. Each of these performances, one a non-starter and the other completed but unexhibited, sought to engage with issues and symbols of Texas—the artist’s new, temporary place of residence.

Conceptually related to her initial idea in terms of its reference to Texas carceral systems, Galindo ideated the performance that became the only exhibited work of her Artpace residency as she was researching recent protests in Texas concerning the detainment of refugee migrant families predominantly (but not exclusively) from Central America at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center, which, as noted, was formerly a medium-security prison. Migration was a growing subject of interest to Galindo, as the year prior to the artist’s residency in San Antonio she had completed *Curso de Supervivencia para Hombres y Mujeres Que Viajarán de Manera Ilegal a Los Estados Unidos*, a survival course organized by the artist to teach a group of ten migrants from Guatemala the skills necessary to navigate their way to the United States (Silvana Editoriale 2011, 229).

The practice of family detention received the US government’s stamp of approval due, in large part, to the tectonic changes to national immigration and security apparatuses in the wake of the coordinated terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11).⁷ US immigration policy has historically been applied asymmetrically, arguably since the first immigration and naturalization procedures were established in 1790, and later efforts such as the Page Act of 1875, which denied citizenship to migrant women and unfree laborers from “China, Japan or any Oriental country.”⁸ This and every subsequent immigration law explicitly or implicitly relies upon a designated agency or agencies to enforce their terms, as well as a concomitant carceral system to detain those deemed to have broken US immigration law. Yet, in the years after 9/11, overburdened immigration courts meant that many migrants who were not from Mexico were allowed to live within the United States for the time between their apprehension and their hearing in immigration court.

A particularly notable moment in this history came in May of 2006, when President George W. Bush addressed the nation from the Oval Office on the topic of immigration reform, calling for an end to the practices described earlier, which he and others in his administration pejoratively termed “catch and release.”⁹ If this was unacceptable to the administration then an alternate plan for these migrants was needed, and nearly a month after his May 2006, President Bush articulated a (not so) novel solution—detention:

And the way you end it is, you build more detention facilities. See, part of the problem was we didn’t have a place to hold these folks. And so now I’m working with Congress to increase the number of detention facilities along our borders, to make sure that when we catch somebody from a place other than Mexico, there’s a place to hold them until such time as we send them back to their country (Bush 2006).

By the time Bush spoke these words two detention facilities had been expressly set aside to detain non-Mexican migrant families with children: the Berks County Residential Center in Pennsylvania (opened 2001) and the T. Don Hutto Residential Center, which had only recently changed its name and purpose. When Hutto had originally opened its doors in 1997 it was, as noted, called the T. Don Hutto Correctional Facility. It had been built and was being operated by Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), a private corporation that continues to do business today under the moniker CoreCivic. Hutto wears its for-profit prison provenance with pride, as the facility’s namesake is one of the three co-founders of CCA—Terrell Don Hutto, whose background as a warden at the Ramsey Unit “prison farm” (a once segregated, African-American prison operation situated across five former plantations) and as head of Arkansas’ Department of Correction gave him operational insight into the prison industrial complex and a nuanced understanding of the future

possibilities for private corporate actors in that system (Woodward 2020).¹⁰ Since its founding in 1983 CCA has undoubtedly been the preeminent actor in the ongoing privatization of US prisons—a central force in perpetuating and expanding a multi-billion dollar market for making profit off of the incarceration of people. Such contracts to build and operate prisons are lucrative propositions for companies like CCA, with contracting counties often paying a dollar amount per person incarcerated, per day. The financial incentives for the private prison sector and their shareholders therefore is to keep more inmates for longer and as cheaply as possible. It is no wonder given these financial incentives that CCA/CoreCivic facilities have been subject to numerous reports and lawsuits concerning human rights abuses (see Mattera et al. 2003).

It wasn't until months after its reopening as a family detention facility that non-governmental groups gained access to Hutto. In a 2007 joint report called "Locking Up Family Values" authored by Women's Commission for Refugee Women & Children (now Women's Refuge Commission) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, the totality of poor conditions at Hutto came to public attention, including the following aspects of the facility: its setting (a barely disguised former prison with all the trappings), processing (those detained wore prison uniforms), accommodations (inadequate room furniture such as cribs, constant and disruptive headcounts, and no toys allowed in cells), food (extremely short times to eat meals and depressing, repeating weekly menus), as well as consistently inadequate access to medical care, education, and legal counsel (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services and Women's Refuge Commission 2007, 63–64). It doesn't take a no scholar to understand the importance of play in a child's daily life, and yet dedicated recreation time for detained families in Hutto was relegated to just one hour a day during the week, and was non-existent on the weekends. The report consolidated a slew of claims made by and on behalf of those families detained at Hutto and documented the awful conditions inside. Resulting vigils and protests outside the facility by prison abolitionists and immigration advocates, lawsuits filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, and sustained press attention all played a part in the eventual closure of Hutto as a family detention facility in 2009 under the Obama administration (even as the practice of family detention continued and expanded, as previously mentioned). This report and those like it were important guides for Galindo and Sirmans, whose essay explicitly pointed to the egregious conditions and history of the Hutto facility.

Galindo's work was made amid this swelter of activist organizing to bring attention to the human rights abuses of the Hutto facility. The artist and staff of Artpace sourced and rented a mobile prison cell from Sweeper Metal Fabricators Corp., an Oklahoma-based manufacturer of road cleaning equipment, as well as detention architecture and furniture. A brochure for the company resides in Artpace's archives and cheerily proclaims on its back cover: "we are sweeping the nation with quality detention products" (Sweeper Metal Fabricators Corp. 2008). This statement is accompanied by a graphic map of the United States, black arrows dynamically spurting out of Oklahoma and landing in nearly every part of the country. Inside the brochure one learns of the company's bespoke design services, control and locking systems, and the full variety of furniture (wall-mounted bunks, privacy shields, institutional desks, and pistol lockers) that Sweeper specializes in producing. Galindo exhibited the cell, and the trailer used to transport it, in the middle of her dedicated exhibition space. In asking the institution and curator to acquiesce to its rental and eventual use, Galindo places both in the uncomfortable position of jailer—seemingly directly countervailing the curatorial imperative to care for the artist and their work. For Sirmans's and Artpace's efforts Galindo gifted each with a cast-bronze replica of the cell door key—an overt acknowledgment of their roles (see Figures 35.1). The cell Galindo/Artpace/Sirmans rented contained a double-bunk bed, a crib, a metal toilet/sink combo, a small table and chair, and a wall-mounted shelf. Two narrow vertical windows were built into the back end of the cell, complementing the single narrow vertical window on the cell door. The door also featured a horizontal opening, used by Artpace staff to deliver meals to Galindo and her family.



FIGURE 35.1 Installation view of Regina José Galindo's *America's Family Prison* at Artpace, San Antonio, Texas, 2008. Courtesy of the Artpace, San Antonio, and Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City.



FIGURE 35.2 Regina José Galindo, *America's Family Prison, llave de prisión familiar*, 2008. Photo: Karmadavis. Courtesy of the Artpace, San Antonio, and Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City.

While photos exist of the Galindo family's time in the cell, the subsequent video created by Galindo documents this time in a more sustained way (Figure 35.2). The video begins, as per its timecode, at 1:38 a.m., with the Galindo family entering the prison cell and closing the door behind them. From there the video quickly cuts to 8:51 a.m., when Galindo

and family wake. Throughout the day Galindo, her husband, and infant daughter live their lives to the best of their abilities. They make their beds, read, and play together. They eat meals pushed through the metal slot in the prison door, drink coffee, and go to the bathroom. The accelerated footage gives a restless, kinetic energy to the video, collapsing time and yet making its duration more pronounced. Around 4 p.m. Galindo sits down with a pad of paper and makes a sequence of three drawings of her family, which are then installed on a series of metal hooks above the toilet. Throughout the course of the video other people—Artpace staff and gallery visitors during the day and evening opening—appear as brief flashes darkening the thin strip of window on the cell door. Galindo's positioning of the camera—on the ceiling and facing the entrance to the cell—makes us aware of both her family's movements and the spectacle of their imprisonment/residence within the context of an artist residency. The video fades out at 8:55 p.m., insinuating that performance continued beyond the temporal bracketing of the tape (see Figure 35.3).

It is important to note how the artist's performance departed from the conditions that migrant families at Hutto endured, if only to insist upon avoiding a strict equivalency between the two. Such a reading would ignore the privileged statuses of the artist (and curator) as consenting and mobile parties. First, and perhaps most obviously, Galindo's performance was brief, with the period of detention known and consented to beforehand. Galindo's performance did not include the family leaving the cell for common areas, waking up for intrusive head counts, or many of the other indignities experienced by those detained in Hutto. Galindo also incorporated items such as stuffed animals/toys and drawings that were expressly not allowed in Hutto's cells.

If Galindo's performance pointed the finger at US detention and immigration policies and practices, it was likely in the service of the cultural exchange that guest worker visa programs were founded upon. Here's the artist, speaking generally about creating work outside of Guatemala, summarizing how her work might function as a "bridge" of understanding:

In my work, I start from Guatemala. I want to show the history of my country: what is not said; what is said; what is denied; what is hidden; what is a lie. Also, I am interested in inquiring beyond my country. I want to show that death is the same in Guatemala and the United



FIGURE 35.3 Regina José Galindo, *America's Family Prison*, 2008. Video (color, silent), 54 minutes 49 seconds. Courtesy of the Artpace, San Antonio, and Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City.

States, or Russia. The individual's pain is the same in the Third World as it is in the First World. I think, I create, and I work because art is a human bridge that allows us to make those connections between different sites, between different individuals (Galindo 2015).

I would argue that Galindo's bridging of different sites happens here in the psychogeographic (dis)continuities between the residency and the detention facility—and operates at the risk of conflating the two. Galindo's pains of self-incarceration might have just as much to say about opening oneself up to being "curated" as about the human rights abuses happening at the Hutto facility. Such an individuated experience of the artist's suffering is meant to synecdochally speak to large-scale societal harms—and art is surmised as the point of transfer and elaboration.

American Family Prison, as well as the curatorial parameters and political realities that delimit and illuminate its potential meanings, serves as a broad indictment of US immigration policies and practices, specifically the detention of refugee migrant families during the end of George W. Bush's presidential administration. In my imagination these heinous practices would have ended in the wake of Galindo's searing performance, yet family detention continued apace, was expanded under the Obama administration, and further intensified by President Donald Trump, who authorized the agencies under his authority to separate and detain children away from their families beginning in 2018—ten years after Galindo's Artpace performance. As of this text's writing in mid-2022, 1,324 (35%) of children separated from their families have yet to be reunited under Joe Biden's presidential administration (see Department of Homeland Security 2022). Galindo's work can be read in ever-new ways under these shifting and still dire conditions, turning the legal imperatives governing international artists' programs such as Artpace, where international artists residing temporarily within the United States are meant to illuminate some aspect of their country of origin for the express edification of US audiences and institutions, into curatorial questions. In this context, Sirmans, as curator, and Artpace, as institution, broker the terms under which Galindo's critique of carceral systems is rendered—a critique that implicates institution, curator, and perhaps Western art institutions writ large alike. That both Sirmans and Robinson were given bronze-cast keys to the cell that held Galindo and her family insinuates that the line between jailer and liberator is a thin one and that, even in the most progressive of art spaces, the traditional modes of museological addressed—here manifested through the key's materiality—still hold.

Notes

- 1 Sirmans selected Margarita Cabrera (El Paso, Texas) and Rodney McMillian (Los Angeles, California) as the other two artists in residence. While each of these three artists produced work worthy of sustained attention, I focus here on Galindo because of her enduring ability to distill societal acts of violence in elegantly iconic performances in which she often appears as both "victim" and "mastermind." As Galindo has noted: "In my work, it seems, superficially, very easy to locate the victim. I am the victim. But when you do a deeper analysis, you understand that as well as being the victim, I was also the mastermind of the action."
- 2 The specificity of the Hutto facility is embedded within the artist's own description of *America's Family Prison*, published in a survey catalogue of her work from 2011. After beginning with a quote from Michel Foucault ("What is fascinating about prisons is that, for once, power doesn't hide or mask itself; it reveals itself as tyranny pursued down to the smallest details"), the artist describes the work: "I rent a family-sized cell from a company that offers all types of products and services to the private-prisons industry in the United States. Taking T. Don Hutto's family cells as my model, I adapt it and live in it with my daughter and husband for 24 hours. When we come out, the door remains open and the cell is shown as a work of art" (Galindo 2011, 244).

- 3 For those interested, Lisa Duggan's entry on "Neoliberalism" in *Keywords for American Studies* provides the most succinct summary of the major tenants of neoliberal economic, political, and cultural policies as those in the service of a "utopian ideology of 'free markets' and minimal state interference, ... slashing state social services and supporting global corporate interests," with the "cultural project of building consent for the upward redistributions of wealth and power that have occurred since the 1970s" (Duggan 2020, 182).
- 4 According to the European Union's *Policy Handbook on Artists' Residencies*, such programs are an "invaluable adjunct to short-term cultural exchanges," and have a duty to foster and "build bridges between countries and cultures contributing to cultural diversity" (OMC Working Group of EU Member States Experts on Artists' Residencies 2014, 9).
- 5 Such growth is difficult to quantify, but residencies that offer financial support and access to additional resources over a long term—one might think here of CORE Residency program in Houston, Texas, which supports artists with studio space, a monetary stipend, and a schedule of seminars and lectures from visiting artists and curators—are far more likely to achieve these goals. Other residencies, such as the one administered by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, give residents direct and focused access to experts in clay and metals (via its close relationship with the plumbing manufacturer, Kohler Co.), and the residency requires no previous experience with these materials.
- 6 Though the origin story behind Artpace is a fascinating one, I'll refer readers to the detailed recounting in Pace and Russell (2015).
- 7 After 9/11, the US Congress enacted these changes via the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which, among other things, dissolved the agency long-tasked with the adjudication and enforcement of immigration laws—Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). INS's authority was subsumed within the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and further parsed over an asymmetrical terrain of sub-agencies, all freshly constituted as well: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). I'd recommend consulting this brief timeline to get a sense of INS's historical roots in the xenophobic policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Alien Contract Labor laws (1885, 1887), to the agency's founding in 1933 and its subsequent expansions/contractions in its programs and directives. I'd recommend consulting the following brief timeline to get a sense of INS's historical roots in the xenophobic policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Alien Contract Labor laws (1885, 1887), to the agency's founding in 1933, and its subsequent expansions/contractions in its programs and directives (USCIS History Office and Library 2012).
- 8 The Page Act of 1875 (Immigration Act), 43rd Congress, Sess. II, Ch. 141, available at: <https://loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1875Immigration%20Act.pdf>, accessed on May 24, 2023.
- 9 A common critique advanced by the Bush administration was that the "vast majority" of migrants allowed to live within the United States were likely to miss their court hearing, effectively migrating without the express approval of US authorities. While not statistically insignificant, the scale of such failures to appear were overstated by the Bush administration (and subsequent conservative/Republican administrations).
- 10 One of Hutto's infamous appearances in US jurisprudence is *Hutto v. Finney* (437 US 678), which decided against Hutto, ruling that incarcerated people could not be placed in punitive isolation for more than 30 days or denied a bunk, that cells could not be overcrowded, that discontinued the use of "grue"—a baked slurry of meat, potatoes, vegetables, eggs, and margarine (also called Nutraloaf or Prison Loaf)—as a punitive measure. All of these practices were endemic in the Arkansas prison system under Hutto (and many reappeared in litigation against the Hutto family detention facility). This marked the first time an inmate brought suit and won out over a correctional facility.

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COLLECTING

The World Should Collect Itself: Collecting Art Globally (and Other Predicaments)

Gerardo Mosquera

One says “global” or “globalization” and it is like a neoliberal mantra that affirms the idea of a world in flux, smoothly interconnected, and fully participatory. The term global suggests a grid, not the axial structure that, stretched from centers of power of different magnitude, actually weaves economic forces, to which the circulation of contemporary art and its market system for collecting follows. Such configuration is far from providing a truly global matrix but one unequally assembled from situations of power that leaves zones of silence in communications, and that, to a great extent, prolongs the world’s inherited colonial configuration. In her 2006 work *Hot Spot*, Mona Hatoum (born to Palestinian parents in Beirut and now living in London) represented the world as a red-hot sphere, pointing to the way in which inequality among populations is one of the many frictions responsible for global warming, which is economic and social as well as it is ecological. To paraphrase George Orwell, globalization is more global for some than for others (Orwell 1945/2003, 112).

There is no doubt that the proliferation of the term global is a result of major world transformations in economy and in every field, which have had a crucial impact on contemporary art. Today’s still limited internationalization of art has two chief directions. In the forefront it is the tremendous expansion of contemporary art’s regional and global circulation and collection, with its multiplicity of new actors from all over the world flowing internationally. The global explosion of art fairs, biennials, international exhibitions, auctions, international collecting, digital and analogic publications, and so on shows the vast expansion of the art world since the 1990s. Related to this, but in the backstage, a phenomenon that I find more important has been taking place: the local proliferation of what we call contemporary art throughout the world. This emergence not only includes strong and plausible artistic practices but also the foundation of artists groups, alternative spaces, irregular organizational forms for art at the base, and private collecting. documenta 15, in Kassel, Germany, presented in 2022 some of these efforts, frequently overlooked by the art world establishment. Lack of infrastructure has stimulated in many cities a sort of lively informal economy of art, yet it has also precipitated the immigration of artists to cities and countries with more established art institutions from those with fewer of these. This process is currently critical in Africa due to the acute

economic and social problems that affect a great part of that continent. In many countries, as we see in those of Central America, contemporary artists, curators, critics, and collectors have also jointly formed a critical force against decorative commercial art and the epigonal nationalistic modernism—nourished by other collectors and by established galleries—that have prevailed in local conservative art establishments.

Most of this activity around the world is “local” in the sense that it is the result of artists’ personal reactions to their milieus, for which they want to have an artistic, cultural, social, and/or commercial impact. But these artists are frequently well informed about other contexts, about mainstream art, and are also looking for an international audience and market. Sometimes they move in and out of local and international spaces. An articulation between the interconnected proliferation of local contemporary art activity and the expanded international circuits weaves the disparate web of the global. These processes entail frictions, compromises, and inequalities, and respond to postcolonial configurations, to lingering segregations, and to economic and structural disproportions that determine the power to spread out and to legitimate art. Private collecting is playing an increasingly leading role in these dynamics. Yet what I find auspicious in the complex ecology of the global is a transformative agency operating from the bottom up, as a result of the diverse of artists working in all corners of the world who have put in play a plurality of visions, agendas, experiences, and cultural differences.

The term “glocal” eases up these contradictions since it connotes a fluid and universal connection between the two terms (local and global) that it smoothly combines in another mantra. Its use has emphasized global reach from local contexts more than the global conditioning of the latter, flattening the intricacies of what actually works as a plural, discordant web of complicated interactions. Despite the insistence about the blurring of the polarities international/local and centers/peripheries, it is obvious that powerful “universalizing” establishments (the ones with the power of determining which art is universal or global and which is local) continue to impose international canons from their hegemonic islands—a result of their leading mercantile and legitimizing capacity. Glocal is a result of the inflation of the all-inclusive connotations of global, which provide some comfortable, misleading impressions that tend to blunt critical action.

Similar coziness is provided by the expression “Global South” which is acquiring increasing currency to substitute old, problematic names such as Third World, non-Western World, underdeveloped or developing world, or just South. These labels have proven imprecise or even inept to describe a transforming global economic map wherein processes of macroeconomic reshaping are being redesigned by growing economies and markets in previously poor countries. China and the “Four Asian Tigers”—Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—are remarkable examples of these processes. Are they part of the Global South? Should we coin the term “Global East” to refer to them? Other strongly emerging economies, such as those of India and Brazil, although suffering the general constraints in today’s economy together with their own, very critical, internal problems and contradictions, are also changing the global status quo and the ways in which modernity, colonialism, and communism have long structured the world—at least in macroeconomic terms. Precisely, the notion of Global South connotes, and is a symptom of, a preconceived South that has acquired global agency.

However, another key question arises: How global is the South? Deconstructing the term Global South reveals that its mere utterance denotes a subaltern condition still in place. There is no need of such a name as Global North: the North is global by default. The very articulation of the term Global South is telling: on the one hand, in an affirmative, optimistic sense, it eases up the persistence of dominance, while denoting difference and empowerment in global action and connoting the working presence of the South in places like New York, Toronto, or London; on the other hand, it signifies prevailing boundaries and hierarchies.

A traveling exhibition of Latin American art from the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros collection was organized in 2013 by the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation (CIFO) in Miami under a meaningful title: *Permission to be Global*.¹ The implicit irony exemplifies how the South is not yet global by definition but requires approval from the establishments that rank art's supposed global quality. Here, the use of the term global is less about bearing an adjective that classifies the artworks' condition, and more about access beyond the so-called art-world ghettos (local sites of artistic production, exhibition, display, and collection that aren't so much part of international circuits of art, money, and fame). The goal of demonstrating how Latin American art is global by curating an exhibition reduced to only Latin America but with the pretense of it being global indicates a universalizing strategy without leaving the ghetto but rather emanating from it. By the same token, it is also interesting that a foundation hosting a collection mainly focused on Latin American art advocates launching this art as global, while keeping its own focus on the regional sphere. Of course, collections do not have to be global to be global. That is, national, regional, or specialized collections have an important global role if they do not limit themselves to acting as ghettos, as happens in China. This country's affluent art market is mainly an internal, quite secluded one, where huge private collections of Chinese art are amassed, inflating local prices, with few international consequences. Internationally successful Chinese artists have reached their artistic legitimation and their market value mainly by exhibiting their work and having it collected abroad, not because of their local activity. In this, as in many other things, China goes against the grain since nationalistic collecting is more common in small countries and in less prosperous ones. Even certain cities foster their own internal markets and collections focused on the art from a country and its diaspora, as it happens in Miami with Cuban art, which mainly attracts Cuban-American collectors. The prosperous Cuban-American community in the city has created an ecological micro-milieu for Cuban art that allows artists to make a living selling locally, but not with considerable implications beyond this milieu. Art ghettos, by definition, can downgrade art's crossover agency if they limit themselves to enclosing and nurturing a favorable microclimate for specific art (as is the case with Miami). But they can also function as launching platforms to the broader international art market, while providing much needed solidarity among artists and curators in these so-called peripheral situations who can develop strategic alliances based on affinities and shared interests.

Important museums in the United States have built remarkable modern and contemporary Latin American art collections that allow them to play a key role in showing and discussing this art, both in the country and internationally. It is the case of The Blanton Museum of Art in Austin and The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston (MFAH), which has recently opened a new building where the first permanent exhibition of modern and contemporary Latin American art in the United States is hosted, together with other collections. Works by Latin American artists have also been included in other, nonspecific displays of the MFAH's collections in the new building. This encyclopedic museum has thus followed simultaneously the "ghetto" and the "crossover" approaches (the latter involving interrelating art from one area with a broader selection of works from elsewhere) for exhibiting its major Latin American art collection. Both the Blanton and the MFAH Latin American art collections have also provided the basis for extensive scholarly research efforts in these institutions, palpable in the creation of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) at the MFAH, showing how collections can trigger fruitful centripetal resonances toward the comprehension of the art collected. Other institutions providing similar foundations for the appreciation and study of Asian art include The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and The Asia Society Museum Collection in New York, both of which are notable for their ancient Asian art collections but have begun to collect contemporary Asian art in recent years.

A growing tendency in the postcolonial world is to assemble private international collections rather than national and regional ones, which was the previous penchant. Paradoxically, this tendency has proved strong in Latin America, a region that has been historically affected

by neuroses around nationalism and identity. Primary examples include the aforementioned Fontanals-Cisneros private collection in Miami and Caracas and the Jumex Collection and the Isabel and Agustín Coppel Collection in Mexico, all of which have gathered international artworks together with Latin American ones. Jumex's and Coppel's collecting, as their programs and projects, are now oriented toward contemporary art in general, although their international scope is still limited in that it remains more attentive to art from Europe and the United States, while retaining some focus on art from Mexico and Latin America.

In the other direction, prominent mainstream European and North American museums have been collecting and exhibiting non-mainstream art from many countries, taking an influential step toward international inclusion. However, the—let us say—“multiculturalist” way in which this has been done by some of these emblematic institutions (that is, working from an additive mentality and including works from a grab-bag of non-white dominant cultures) tends to reproduce the boundaries in a certain manner. Take the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, a project launched and funded by the Swiss bank UBS, aimed at “challenging a historically Western-centered view of art.”² It has mainly done so by appointing curators from three different world geo-cultural regions (South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa) to organize three shows with contemporary artworks from each curator's region, which were first exhibited at the museum's premises in New York and in other cities abroad. All the works in the exhibitions were acquired for the Guggenheim's permanent collection. The project was active from 2012 to 2018.

Such positive effort is very welcome, but instead of engaging in a sort of constricted affirmative action that maintains national or regional borders, it would have been preferable if the Guggenheim instead privileged art from those regions included regularly in its exhibitions, collections, and programs—not for being from North Africa or Southeast Asia, but for its value as art without geo-cultural family names. This would not entail erasing art's response to its context. On the contrary, art would contribute more to its global value and legitimation if we foreground the specificity of its context rather than labeling it in a general way as global just because it is antiseptically cosmopolitan. Curating and collecting significant art from around the world require knowledge about art's function in its context and its place in alternative art histories. It also asks to broaden our aesthetic perception. The point would be to read the art, not to look at the passport, developing consistent international general programs and collections led by a non-canonized notion of the international, one guided by Édouard Glissant's idea of *mondialité*, which responds to the interaction of diversity and the right to opacity (Glissant 1990). Is the Guggenheim regularly collecting or considering collecting art for those regions now that the MAP program is over? The best achievement of MAP would have been to incline the Museum to understand (I underline this word), collect, and exhibit artists from around the world, broadening its international approach and its approach to difference.

Another example of how institutions are dealing with the pressure to go beyond Eurocentric collecting is the London-based Tate Modern's system of appointing curators from Southern regions who function more as a sort of advisers on art from their geographic areas of birth, mainly for collecting purposes, and whose positions are funded by wealthy collectors, again from the same regions—too much geography here! These experts work for the Tate Modern's so-called “international curators,” who are the ones entitled to curate exhibitions. Although this system seeks to make the Tate Modern more globally inclusive, it reproduces a hierarchy that crowns certain art as international, while relegating other art to its regions of origin, as if it is waiting for permission to be considered global. The “international curators” are the gatekeepers who make decisions, while the curators from the “peripheries” just cater to them with artworks from their regions. These kinds of efforts are, however, transitional multiculturalist strategies that we should not dispute in a reactive way. The point is to build critically upon mainstream institutions' awareness of their need

to move forward in reaction to the globalized times. The expansion of these institutions' collections has been the main achievement of their affirmative action projects, even if the newly acquired artworks do not have considerable presence in the collections' displays.

Fortunately, the way in which mainstream museums are now acquiring works and showing their collections is increasingly becoming more inclusive and integrative, as it is the case of the reinstalling of The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)'s collection in 2019 at their newly designed building in New York, and very recently that of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, which seems inspired by the new MoMA. The Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives (C-MAP) internal research program established by MoMA in 2009 for studying "art histories outside North America and Western Europe" undoubtedly contributed to the new view.³ This general tendency is the belated result of pressure from the representatives of the South to achieve a truly international circulation, legitimation, and collecting of art, one that is also sensitive to gender, racial, and cultural representations. Such pressure confronted the prevailing segregated and ignorant way art had been circulating internationally, which had also determined which art had a supposedly "universal" stature. This situation was initially challenged by the second Havana Biennial in 1986 (see Mosquera 2010). The Biennial gathered the first global contemporary art show, triggering the foundation of what Rafał Niemojewski has called a "new breed of biennials" in the "peripheries" (Istanbul, Kwangju, Porto Alegre, and the like) that confronted the Venice Biennale paradigm and decentralized the organization of these events (Niemojewski 2010, 100). However, when visiting the new MoMA exhibition and other new displays of museum's collections, one gets the distinct feeling that the museum has responded more to a quota mentality than to a desire for real knowledge and understanding of the world's art. It seems as if we were going through a transitional moment of adjustment in which an inversion of the previous segregationist approach has taken place, apparently under a moral pressure to include everybody, which results in overcrowded, archive-oriented displays. Such a didactic approach indicates the need to explain alternative art histories that were excluded before.

There is a predicament inherent to this process. Are these powerful institutions extending to contemporary art the anthropological act of "collecting the world"—famously criticized by James Clifford (1988)—and therefore consolidating their already dominant power? How to react to this catch-22 situation between inclusion and segregation? Inclusion, especially comprising internal critical action, is better than segregation. The challenge is still to confront cooptation, tokenism, and assimilation, which are common in the art world today. Beyond this, artists and cultural workers in "the world" that is being collected need to build horizontal agency and plural alternative actions.

The world should collect itself. It is not doing so mainly because of the budgetary and organizational challenges that so many public museums and institutions suffer. Consequently, they lack resoluteness and often succumb to a culture of complaint. The rise of private collectors and museums have somewhat compensated for the deficit in public funds, but the situation remains critical.

Precisely, a problem that seriously limits the capacity of the so-called Global South to be truly global is, paradoxically, its lack of "South." The prevailing shortage in South-to-South ventures, cooperation, and networks is a colonial legacy that has been insufficiently modified. Quite beyond the art field, the United Nations considers it a priority for the whole world to tackle, but such collaboration remains scarce in the art field.⁴ South-South "horizontal" dynamics are of major importance to "fill in," at a global level, the "vertical" North-South radial circulation schemes generated in global and regional centers, a pattern inherent to colonization as well as globalization. Only the action of horizontal networks, institutional programs, and collections can extend and democratize international art circulation and collection and connect marginal areas into the system.

More important is the role of networks in diversifying art judgment: only what I would call solid "Southern horizontality" will decentralize art's legitimation by establishing and

empowering alternative criteria coming from different epistemes, values, positions, and agendas. This expansion will facilitate a better general comprehension of the art that has been produced throughout the world and its action in modernity as well as in the contemporary scene. A way to measure how global the Global South actually *is* would be to consider its capacity to legitimate art at the international level, which is weak because it is still conditioned by vertically imposed canons and dependency on Euro-American values as well as by the acceptance of certain colonialist ranking mentality. A simplified description of the current scheme of art circulation and legitimation would be: radial global circulation yet still defined by central legitimation, which is particularly strong in the art market. This dynamic affects collecting very especially, because of the commercial and prestige values of mainstream canons. And, as Terry Smith has said, “energy flows from peripheries to the center but power to define the overall agenda always comes from the center to the peripheries” (Smith 2015, 239). Many collectors from the South prefer buying art from their own countries in New York at Sotheby’s and Christie’s auctions, at higher prices, to acquiring similar works at home because of the prestige involved and because these auctions still establish the prices and the legitimacy of the works in the international market. Much more independence is required from Southern international collectors, who should develop their own criteria together with curators and critics from their regions, diverting the preponderant vertical flow to pursue a more diversified movement. This is difficult for them since the value of the works is still determined by a hegemonic market.

The problem goes beyond the will for access and legitimation of the less favored in the distribution of the global pie. The problem is also global because it affects the possibility for audiences across the world to know art that circulates less and is therefore less collected. Only multidirectional webs of interactions will truly *world* art. Worlding art is possible because the explosion in art’s circulation and the mushrooming of contemporary art throughout the planet has set values for international art based on codes historically designed by mainstream’s formal orientations. This system has been criticized as a “McDonaldization” of art that affects the existence of more differentiated art practices, which would give shape to a global mosaic-like pattern of discrete cells that will need translation to communicate among them (on McDonalidation, see Ritzer 1993). That aspiration did not happen: to circulate globally artists have to “speak” a lingua franca, a shared contemporary art language that makes direct communication possible, although non-readable areas remain in the process. This “English” of art is broken and reinvented by diverse new subjects who gain access to expanding international networks. They do so from their own multiple aims, experiences, cultures, subjectivities, etc., activating an agency of plurality and keeping their right to opacity—as Glissant has advocated for—within the international language of art (Glissant 2004). On the one hand, there is convergence in a lingua franca, and on the other, its pluralizing mutation through the divergence of its multiple speakers, with their accents and “improprieties”: a divergence in convergence. Contrary to the Brazilian modernist paradigm of cultural “anthropophagy,” artists around the world are not cannibalizing an “international art” imposed by the art centers, appropriating and re-signifying it for their own needs but actively *making* it firsthand. Difference is increasingly constructed through specific plural modes of creating artistic texts and not by means of representing cultural or historical elements characteristic of particular contexts—it lays in action more than it does in representation (see Mosquera 2013, 233–238).

In the midst of the convolutions, ambiguities, and contradictions of the general framework that I have drafted here in rough form, private art collecting is flourishing. A clear indicator of its increase—and of its power—is the boom of art fairs around the world, which is also a main component in the upsurge of art’s international circulation. Paco Barragán has argued that since the 2000s we have been living in “the art fair age,” which has followed the “biennialization” of the 1990s (see Barragán 2008). This is a result not only of the proliferation of art fairs but also of their qualitative change. They have transformed the way

in which art is marketed and, very importantly, at the same time they have appropriated functions and methods of biennials and other art institutions. It has become an axiom that today biennials look like art fairs and vice versa, and a frequent corollary is, as Anna Tilroe has exclaimed, that the art world “is one big market” (Tilroe 2012). In a similar apocalyptic vein José Fernández Vega asserts that with globalization culture and market tend to merge, and global art becomes an effect of the market more than of the execution of a post-national program, while biennials substitute slogans for concepts (Vega 2007).

In contrast, Carlos Basualdo considers that biennials are “unstable institutions” that allow more room for trying new and more socially committed models than what is possible for museums and other more established art institutions (Basualdo 2007). I would add that the weight of these institutions’ permanent collections contributes to their lower degree of nimbleness and dynamism—collections can be a burden. Back in 1977, Marcia Tucker, founder of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, conceived its collection as a dynamic one to be renovated every ten years. This radical project was never achieved, and today the Museum’s modest collection is almost inactive. As a result of the speed with which art circulates today, museums need to be spaces where art happens as well as where art is preserved and shown. They have been giving more room to temporary exhibitions and events, leaning toward the European Kunsthalle model—art centers that do not have permanent collections—no matter how important their collections might be (see Wege and Müller 2013). Museums that only show their collections are exceptional today.

The flexible character of biennials and art fairs has been instrumental in their proliferation since this model has proven efficient to operate within a global, neoliberal world economy. These events also create spaces for art in places lacking institutional facilities, while promoting the international circulation of artists previously secluded in their local contexts, as curator Okwui Enwezor has underlined (Enwezor 2007, 116–117). In some cases art fairs have a bigger impact on their contexts than biennials, as in the new artistic and cultural energy brought about by Art Basel to Miami, a city in the United States that nonetheless, with its predominant Latin population, has characteristics of the Global South.

Are we now in the private collector age? Talking about ages, it seems as if a time machine has taken us back to the pre-museum era (before around 1800) when all collections were private and for private use. For good and for bad, private collectors are acquiring a great deal of power in the art world, to the point of surpassing curators in their influence as legitimizers, promoters, and gatekeepers, and they have extended their influence over public art institutions. We are not in the eighteenth century, and private collectors exercise their clout not only through the act of buying—which could be thought of as an act of curating—but also in the increasing public role of collectors and their assets. There is a subjacent contradiction between private accumulation of important artworks and the public responsibility—even the social duty—that such accumulation deontologically entails. Luckily, many private collectors have assumed very active and significant public efforts beyond participating on museums’ boards, supporting their budgets, lending artworks for exhibitions, or loaning and then donating them. As for the latter, it is a paradox that collectors tend to give substantial donations and loans to rich museums, instead of supporting less affluent institutions. Of course, a number of these last institutions cannot provide all the conditions that art conservation demands, but in many other cases they can, or can be stimulated and helped to create the conditions that art conservation demands. Loans and donations also constitute the response to the large publics that some institutions attract. However, reaching the smaller but more particular audiences of smaller institutions should be more valued, especially in countries with scant public support for culture. If they want their social role to be more effective, private collectors will have to decentralize their generosity in search of broader, more diversified communal contexts for their assets, seeking to act where crucial needs exist. The recent return of artworks expropriated by colonial powers back to their countries of origin undertaken by some North American and European museums could be

an inspiration for private collectors willing to donate works—not necessarily in the sense of returning works to the place where they were created, but as a claim to decentralize the possession of artistic assets to make them more broadly accessible.

In the United States, major museums were created from major fortunes in the twentieth century out of a modernizing and civilizing agenda, shaping to this day a culture of private patronage. This contrasts with the situation in Europe and, to a certain extent, Latin America, where art is seen as a human right that the State must guarantee; which is proving to be a very difficult mission in neoliberal times of crisis. In part because of this deficit, today we also witness a positive tendency among private collectors to undertake very active public initiatives. Some have put their collections on permanent public display, as in the remarkable cases of the Margulies, the Rubell Family, and the de la Cruz international collections in Miami. Others have created museums and art centers—frequently in buildings erected to that end—based on their collections and run by foundations. These institutions have kept the collections active and, going beyond their assets, have developed important programs of temporary exhibitions, education, conferences, workshops, grants, and awards, having established libraries and archives. Remarkable examples are the Jumex Museum in Mexico City, created by collector and patron Eugenio López Alonso, The Latin American Art Museum of Buenos Aires (MALBA), initiated by collector Eduardo Constantini, and the aforementioned CIFO, which holds Ella Fontanals-Cisneros's international collection, while giving grants to Latin American artists and organizing temporary exhibitions, lectures, and other activities dedicated to Latin American art.⁵ Many works in this collection have been consigned in long-term loans to museums mainly in the United States and Europe. Fontanals-Cisneros was willing to donate a major part of her Latin American art collection to the city of Madrid to create a center devoted to this art, but an agreement was not achieved, showing that sometimes the private collectors' will to make their assets public becomes difficult to negotiate with the cities' administrations and other public institutions.

Other important collectors have also shared their collections by providing beneficial contributions to public institutions from the private sector. Patricia Phelps de Cisneros has taken such "decentralization" further. Her major Latin American colonial, modern, and contemporary art collection based in New York and Caracas has always been quite dynamic; in recent years she has made substantial donations to twelve museums mainly in the United States but also in Europe and Latin America. These donations reached a more diversified range of recipients than usually happens and were tailored in dialogue with the receiving institutions according to their needs and to their capabilities for research and exhibition. An extraordinary case is the Inhotim Institute, created in Minas Gerais, Brazil by Bernardo de Mello Paz as a private not-for-profit space to show his fast-growing collection, it was later transformed into an institute ruled by a board of directors while continuing to receive substantial support from Paz, among other private and public funders. Everything is huge in Inhotim: of the 2,000-acre area, 1,000 acres are kept as a natural reserve. The institution hosts a botanical garden, a landscape design area, several large-scale outdoor art commissions by leading artists, and numerous pavilions where the contemporary art collection is shown and public and education programs are offered. The collection is international with a focus on Brazil.

Affluent private collectors from formerly colonized parts of the world are also advocating for and sponsoring the art of their countries or regions of origin as members of boards of directors of mainstream museums, to which they substantially contribute. They have created and funded curatorial positions in these institutions for experts in the art of their region's art, as Estrellita Brodsky has done at the New York MoMA, where Patricia Cisneros has created a research institute for the study of art from Latin America. A major contribution by private collectors has thus been their use of financial power and prestige to open up mainstream institutions to represent art that might have been overlooked otherwise. It is a paradox that art from "peripheral" countries with weak or not so affluent economies has

been pushed into the art centers of hegemonic museums by virtue of the economic soft pressure delivered by wealthy collectors from those countries.

There is a shift from the public to the private that is proving beneficial in countries with limited public institutions, those that are moreover organizationally and economically less powerful. Naturally, the situation also entails a remarkable exercise of power, which even resides sometimes in the hands of a single individual and can, for this reason, be hazardous in vulnerable milieus. In contrast with the positive efforts by some private collectors mentioned previously, many others around the world hoard enormous collections for personal enjoyment and investment, which therefore remain secluded from public use. In one of Pablo Helguera's recent *Artoons*—cartoons that humorously deconstruct the art world—a character checks an artist's exhibition resume and tells him: "It's impressive ... but I don't see any shows in a mayor collector's luxury yacht" (Figures 36.1 and 36.2). Private ownership can be inconsistent too, and lead to disasters such as the Swiss Daros Latinamerica Collection's abrupt ending of their activities in 2015, which included closing Casa Daros in Rio de Janeiro after an enormous material and intellectual investment. Another example was the tragic fate of Fundación Cultural Televisa's Centro Cultural Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City, which



FIGURE 36.1 Pablo Helguera, *Untitled* (from the series *Artoons*, 2008–). Courtesy of Pablo Helguera.

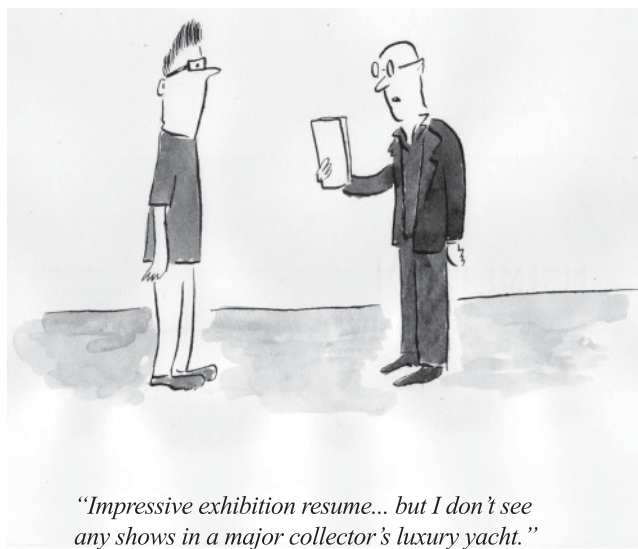


FIGURE 36.2 Pablo Helguera, *Untitled* (from the series *Artoons*, 2008–). Courtesy of Pablo Helguera.

was closed and its building demolished almost immediately after its patron Emilio Azcárraga passed away, while the collection was dispersed among the heirs. Private collectors can also soak up vast resources in creating whimsical, and potentially dysfunctional, collections and museums, the paradigm being Carlos Slim's Soumaya Museum in Mexico City, a sort of contemporary curiosity cabinet where art, kitsch, and decorative objects meet.

It is natural that collecting and collections continue to expand and gain power over exhibitions, public art, community art, "artivism" (art practices that are also activist), or "usership-oriented practices" (as Stephen Wright (2018) calls them, just because they lay the foundations of what we call visual or plastic arts. Unlike the rest of the arts and literature, visual artists are traditionally engaged in producing unique, sumptuary collectibles able to acquire a high market value. While in the twenty-first century artworks have been minimized in terms of social interaction in a world of real time electronic communications and mass consumption, at the same time they are maximized as fetishized objects with auratic value that translates into economic value in the art marketplace. (I am referring here to the influential essay by Benjamin 1935/1969). In contradiction to the times, emphasis is placed on the artifact, which transforms itself into signed documentation in the case of dematerialized, ephemeral, time-based artworks, and even in a "live" art situation such as interactive performance. This documentation becomes evidence certified to function as a vicarious "original" to be collected. Art is bound to a physical substrate to such an extent that in the case of immaterial works this substrate—such as performance documentation—is thus created in a substitutive manner. Art's auratic condition also contradicts technology's reproductive capabilities, as artists deliberately limit their production to a small number of copies, each becoming again a sophisticated "original." This "original sin" (the "sin of the original") condemns the work of art to serve solely as to private or public possession, to be confined in collections. One does not seek to own exclusive use of a song or a novel, but art viewership is based on ownership, which frequently secludes the artworks for exclusive individual use.

What about Internet art? It is telling that an unforeseen explosion in digital art took place only when the blockchain system allowed artists to create non-reproducible originals that can be possessed and collected—the moment when technology conveyed the possibility to restrain, not to flow, expand, and circulate. Non-fungible Tokens (NFTs) facilitate more independence and flexibility for artists and art circulation, but within the rules of the established system, for which this "cryptoart" was tailored. NFTs are even shown in exhibitions, in art fairs, and are auctioned, pointing to the fact that the NFT system does not really seek to challenge the conventional model of circuits of art display and marketing but to expand them in a new way. Therefore, one of the reasons that NFTs are desired is the possibility they introduced through blockchain technology of tracking down the history of an artwork—that is, by virtue of reinforcing the validity of the collectible original. The changes introduced by cryptoart keep the whole system the same, proving eloquently to what extent art is structurally bonded to ownership and collecting. Moreover, NFTs were born in the habitat of the market, where they continue to thrive more than in the circuits of art exhibition and discourse.

Beyond all the outlined considerations, I would like to speculate in more general terms about how global is collecting in itself. Even if their artworks travel or are lent, collections have a subjacent inclination to stay together as a body of work. This closeness comes from the will and function of gathering and preserving objects together because collecting has a subconsciously fixated mode of origin. Collections are centripetal by nature and we curators know well that even if collectors lend their possessions, the act of lending always carries an immanent tension. This has to do with the historical process—initiated in the Renaissance and consolidated in the eighteenth century—of nurturing the autonomy of art, moving it away from its previous hybrid religious, communal, representational, and practical functions. This process has secured art's withdrawal from the world as it enters the possessive domains of collections and museums. There is an intrinsic contradiction between collections and the global flows of the art world. Collections tend to tighten, not to expand, while globalization is centrifugal: it is about openness and flow.

To use Zygmunt Bauman's terminology, collections are "solid," while globalization is "liquid" (Bauman 2000). However, although collections seclude art, they can also facilitate art's circulation when the collector or institution shows or lends their assets.

If collections and museums want to respond to the challenges of contemporary art's escalating international production and circulation, they will have to confront their own conservative nature. Modern museums began as collections that were shown publicly and permanently. Then their space acquired importance beyond collections, as a site where exhibitions and events took place. Perhaps today's situation points to a third major shift in the art museum's role, one that will take it away from the prevalent collection-centered and space-centered routines to a more dynamic endeavor, in which the museum will be a moving activity spread over the globe. Such rhizomatic museum-as-hub practices will entail a decentralized institution that will conceive, curate, and/or participate simultaneously in a wide range of diverse projects, mainly collaborations and joint ventures, at the very spot where art practices take place, with very flexible levels of involvement, and fostering local collecting (Mosquera 2006). Although these ideas are to a certain extent more of a utopian provocation hoping to build for the future, they can be implemented. In fact, I advocated for them while working as curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and managed to transform its Education Department in 2006 into a new program that was called Museum as Hub, which partially put this concept into practice for several years (see Inouye n.d.).

A problem with such a perspective is that it could function in a top-down way and thus involve a qualitative new intrusion of hegemonic institutions in art activities inside their own contexts, which could act as a patriarchal and patronizing imposition. Indeed, a decentralized system in which local museums, institutions, and artists play chief roles could also work the other way around. It could enhance and expand the initiative and action of the former in their own contexts, where they often work in precarious conditions, by taking advantage of financial and moral support and by using the facilities that the network could provide. And these subjects are not passive: their agency could contribute to a disruption of the museum's centered control.

Once I was proposing these speculations at a panel discussion in Sao Paulo and my colleague Aracy Amaral confronted my view by exclaiming: "What we need in Latin America is more museums and collections! Your ideas are provocative, but what we have to demand right now is to preserve and show artworks and archives that remain in precarious conditions." I think that both of us were right, and that our concerns are part of the multifaceted predicaments and challenges that we must address today.

Notes

- 1 *Permission to Be Global. Latin American Art from the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection*, Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation, Miami, 2013. Liz Munsell, one of the curators, states in the show's catalogue (Cisneros Fontals Art Foundation 2013, 17): "The word 'permission' highlights the power dynamics behind rosy images of the global citizen or the internationally-minded institution."
- 2 All information about the UBS MAP Global Initiative is from the Guggenheim website: <https://www.guggenheim.org/map>, accessed on July 12, 2022.
- 3 See "Global research: C-Map," Museum of Modern Art website: <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/international-program/global-research>, accessed on November 14, 2021.
- 4 A United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation was created in 1974 and is still active; see: <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/about/about-unossc>, accessed on July 12, 2022.
- 5 In 2021, Constantini acquired for the Museum a painting by Frida Kahlo that set the record for the highest price ever paid for an artwork from Latin America: US\$34.9 million.

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ARCHIVE

Ghosts in the Archive: Exorcism, Resurrection and the Possibilities of Repair

Hammad Nasar

Evidence lurks inside archives—alongside questions, propositions, promises, fictions, and ghosts. This space for multiplicity is necessary to enable contemporary artistic practice to engage the past in critical dialogue, to prevent slippage into an *unhinged* contemporary where praxis, or at least the discourse around it, acknowledges no pasts, or privileges genealogies that reinforce only convenient narratives.

For the archive's latent possibilities to emerge, however, there is the necessary pre-requisite of discovery. Most archives are not available for research or are accessible only at great cost. In contrast, and in line with the supply driven nature of most art historical research, those more easily available are overused. What results from this structural imbalance is a discipline where ghosts lurking within archives often stay trapped there, or emerge slowly in single file, blinking into the occasional light of attention, only to return to archival catacombs until summoned again.

This same pattern holds for art historical narratives structured around collections and survey exhibitions. As demonstrated in the “Curating Nation” project I initiated at University of the Arts London's (UAL) Decolonising Arts Institute, there is considerable inertia in the nature of the stories of British art that travel.¹ A review of the roster of internationally touring exhibitions organized by Tate over 2019–2020 presents an embarrassingly familiar roll call of canonical artists: Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Barbara Hepworth, David Hockney, the pre-Raphaelites, and multiple exhibitions of the work of J. M. W. Turner.² Comparing this list to the dizzying diversity of artists nominated in the last few years for the Turner Prize (also administered by Tate), or artists included in recent editions of the quinquennial *British Art Show*—both taking the pulse of the contemporary in Britain—produces a cognitive dissonance.³

This incongruity returns us to the realm of the “unhinged contemporary” where the artistic practices of the current crop of artists of Bajan, Bangladeshi, Colombian, Indian, Irish, Israeli, Jamaican, Pakistani, Palestinian, Scottish, and Tanzanian heritage seem to have taken root—suggesting the openness of the contemporary moment has not worked its way back into the histories of British art that await fuller accounts of the contributions of

earlier migrant generations. This disconnect is mirrored in the wider cultural sphere where critical prizes are showered on Steve McQueen's *Small Axe* series of films for television—each feature-length film a searing examination of the Caribbean immigrant experience in the racial hostility of 1970s–1980s London; but, where it is *Downton Abbey*, a costume drama set in an English aristocratic country estate that gently traces the fading arc of Empire in the early twentieth century that is marketed for mass foreign consumption. In culture, as in much else, supply begets demand.

Curating Nation examines the space for curatorial agency to address such disconnects in how institutions articulate cultural narratives of nation through collection displays, periodic surveys and exhibitions that tour internationally. It is in critical dialogue with the rich vein of contemporary artistic practice in Britain invested in liberating ghosts trapped in the archive—“reparative history,” for example, is one of the principal themes explored in *British Art Show 9*, an exemplar of the “national survey” exhibition, and one of the principal points of focus for the *Curating Nation* project.⁴

This chapter follows the transnational trajectory of a collaborative research inquiry catalyzed by a modest archival project my colleagues and I initiated when I was head of research and programs at Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong in 2014. The project comprised the digitization of a small selection of photographs and correspondence relating to the influential exhibition *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Postwar Britain* (1989) at Hayward Gallery, London, from the personal archives of its curator; the Pakistan-born, London-based artist, curator, editor, and activist Rasheed Araeen (b. 1935).⁵ The exhibition was a polemical intervention in a Eurocentric story of modernism that still dominates Britain. In a paper at an art history conference in 2015, I read a more recent exhibition at Tate Britain, *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (2012), through the archive of *The Other Story*, and argued that Araeen's exhibition continues to “haunt” British art history (see Nasar 2015).⁶ By considering new exhibitions of diasporic artists—Rasheed Araeen and Li Yuan-chia—that happened elsewhere (in this case in Sharjah (United Arab Emirates), Karachi (Pakistan) and Taipei (Taiwan)), I argued that new narratives are being proposed for diasporic artists that foreclose the entangled histories of British Art that are yet to be written. This was an attempt to use an ongoing archival project to make propositions that I have earlier described as setting off “little firecrackers in the street”—interrupting daily routines to encourage others to look out from their windows and invite wider engagement without a specific end in mind (Nasar and Zitzewitz 2018, 113).

This paper as a “little firecracker” sparked two independent projects invested in exploring such entanglements. The London, Asia project (2016–2023)—co-led by me and Sarah Victoria Turner at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art—posits London as a key, yet under-explored, site in the construction of art historical narratives in Asia, and reflects on the ways in which the growing field of modern and contemporary art history in Asia intersects with, and challenges, existing histories of British art. Through the lenses of exhibitions, institutional patronage, and art schools as a cosmopolitan site of encounter, London, Asia has sought to test methodologies and socialize a field of inquiry by means of research grants, conferences, workshops, publications, and a forthcoming exhibition.⁷

The second project, the exhibition *Speech Acts: Reflection-Imagination-Repetition* at Manchester Art Gallery (2018–2019), curated by myself with Kate Jesson, was part of, and in conversation with, the Black Artists and Modernism (BAM) project, led by artist Sonia Boyce. BAM explored the narrow ways in which the story of modernism in Britain has accounted for, or often failed to account for, works by artists of Asian and Afro-Caribbean heritage in public collections.⁸ *Speech Acts* placed works typically considered “collection highlights”—those available in reproduction as postcards from the gift shop or celebrated in glossy commemorative publications—alongside lesser-known works that are seen principally through the lenses of biography and difference. This focus on difference was frequently the result of specific collection initiatives driven by public policy that often privileged

the cultural heritage of the artist without disturbing the canonical art historical narrative—almost always built on the works of white, male artists.

The exhibition showcased works by, and archival documents relating to, more than forty artists drawn principally from four public collections in Manchester and Bradford, and examined the role of museums in how cultural institutions narrate collective stories through the collections they hold.⁹ Central to the exhibition was the work of Li Yuan-chia (1929–1994)—who arrived in 1960s London via Bologna (Italy) and Taipei (Taiwan), and whose singular and influential practice has yet to be accounted for in the narratives of British art. The research process for the exhibition, and its coverage in a BBC documentary, were revealing of the way in which a seemingly neutral bureaucracy reinforces particular readings and narratives with the capacity—through conventions of cataloguing, for example, that focus on the place of birth of the artist—to act as blinkers to how practices may be read. This is discussed further later.

Both London, Asia and *Speech Acts* also served as research and curatorial petri dishes to test modes of working collaboratively with artists, academics, institutions, collections, and wider communities of interest around a specific set of archives and collections. Our intention was to establish open-ended models of working that privilege experimentation, share methodologies and resources, and “socialize” a field—through convening gatherings that discuss and debate new possibilities—that is not self-contained but “infects” research and artistic practice engaged with Britain, Asia, and their diasporas.¹⁰ Both projects set out with the intention of producing what I have previously referred to as “art histories of excess” (Nasar and Zitzewitz 2018, 106–112)—collaborative, transnational ways of working that have the potential to overwhelm rather than feed the existing infrastructures of art historical production and museum validation. The goal of art histories of excess is to question the centrality, or at the very least stability, of a “canon.”¹¹

Both projects were based in British institutions and leveraged cultural collections and archives in Britain to fuel a diverse, intergenerational, and transnational set of research and artistic practices. The goal is for these to have the capacity to reveal, possibly exorcise, or better still learn to live with, the ghosts of Empire that continue to haunt British accounts of modernism in and beyond archives and museums.

Retrieving Li Yuan-Chia from the Archive

There is, as art historian Karin Zitzewitz points out, a “completist” tendency toward considerations of the archive (Nasar and Zitzewitz 2018, 113). Archives are measured in running meters (or feet), in number of records (thousands), and in terrabytes of data. They must be conserved, catalogued, arranged, and (since the rise of digital technologies) digitized before they enable researchers to ask questions of art historical narratives. Without such mediation and organization, art historical access narrows to a small number of contemporaneous accounts by figures who become gatekeepers to specific artistic legacies, albeit often inadvertently. Their singular accounts become substitutes for the archive and then get repeated to produce a “thin” art history that does not allow, in the memorable phrasing of Michel Foucault, a “density of discourse” to emerge (Foucault 1969/1972, 171). This is not to overlook the limitations and blind spots of archival records but to hold open the possibility of archives as the material traces of alternative histories with the capacity to enable more complex narratives.

The Li Yuan-chia collection at the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester is one such archive; it has been stuck in the art historical purgatory of being uncatalogued since it was first deposited by the LYC Foundation following Li’s death in 1994. The lead curator for the last two institutional survey exhibitions exploring Li’s legacy—at London’s Camden Art Centre (2001) and the Taipei Fine Art Museum (2012)—was the critic, curator and

former chair of the LYC Foundation, the late Guy Brett.¹² Brett was an eloquent champion of Li's work, frustrated by the art world's lack of regard for it: "The fact that Li Yuan-chia has been missed by the art establishments of so many countries suggests that they have no instruments fine enough to detect a journey such as his ... crossing geographical and cultural boundaries but also those of the concepts and practices of art" (Brett 2000, 11).

Li Yuan-chia was born in Guangxi, China. He moved first to Taiwan in 1949, where he was part of the Ton-Fan Group of artists experimenting with abstraction, then in 1962 to Italy, where he was associated with the Punto Group of artists in Bologna (this text draws on Nasar 2019a, 2020). An invitation to show his work at Signals Gallery (1965 and 1966) brought him to London. He stayed to participate in multiple exhibitions at Lisson Gallery.¹³ Li's work at the time drew liberally from modernist, Zen Buddhist, and Daoist practices to explore ideas of space, life, and time. The initial vehicle for his explorations was "the Point"—originally a spot of color or mark in monochromatic paintings and reliefs, it eventually took the form of magnetized objects that could be moved around on metallic discs. He called these magnetic works "toys," inviting active audience participation.

The artists he showed with at Signals and Lisson Gallery included Lygia Clark, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Derek Jarman, David Medalla, Mira Schendel, and Takis. With them Li shared multiple avant-garde interests—in kinetics, participation, and concrete poetry. On a Christmas visit to Cumbria, he decided to settle in the Cumbrian village of Banks. There he acquired a set of dilapidated farm buildings from his friend and neighbor, the painter Winifred Nicholson, and transformed them into a remarkable art space, The LYC Museum & Art Gallery (LYC [for Li Yuen-chia] or LYC Museum).¹⁴

Between 1972 and 1983 the LYC Museum showcased the work of more than 300 artists. Alongside Winifred Nicholson, Li's eclectic exhibition program mixed the work of local artists (Andy Christian and Susie Honour) with that of totemic national figures (Barbara Hepworth and Paul Nash) and contemporary artists now of international renown (Lygia Clark and Andy Goldsworthy) but then barely known in Britain. The archive reveals the LYC's range—besides its galleries, there was a children's art room, a library, performance space, printing press, communal kitchen, and garden. It hosted rug-making workshops. Children played in its courtyard. It was an open space for the multiple possibilities of art.

The LYC has often been positioned as Li sacrificing his own practice, while he gave "his attention to others" (Brett and Sawyer 2000, 148). I have previously argued—in part by connecting the LYC to the archival traces of Li's work in contemporary exhibitions of participatory art practices—that it was his most important work, a natural extension of his interest in participation (Nasar 2019a). Through it, Li was showing us how the operational activities of running a museum—the openings, performances, the programming, publishing catalogues and running a communal kitchen—could themselves be considered artwork. The archive, however, does not treat these different types of activities equally, with exhibitions and artwork documentation served best through catalogues and photographic records.

Speech Acts positioned a stylized version of the LYC Museum—with its David Nash-designed window—at the heart of the exhibition. The exhibition embodied an ambition to establish a sustained engagement with the Li Yuan-chia archive that could work toward addressing the gulf between the accounts of Li and his art that exist in the world, and a more expansive and finely worked understanding of his practice that makes space for the LYC and the network of friendships and collaborations that seeded and sustained it. We treated the exhibition not as the outcome of concerted research but as a site of action research, a place for staging research propositions in progress and inviting dialogue and collaboration. For instance, by devoting a gallery in *Speech Acts* to the spirit of the LYC's children's art room, we pointed to the gaps in our understanding of how the LYC functioned beyond the exhibition of objects, and initiated a process of testing how these gaps in knowledge could be buttressed, for example, through interviewing those with lived experience of the LYC drawn to the exhibition.

One specific invitation was to the filmmaker and artist, Helen Petts. After directing arts programming for television, Petts trained as a painter and brings a painter's sensibility toward color and texture to her production of moving image works that focus on the lives and work of artists and musicians at the margins of mainstream culture, mixing archival footage with field recordings, and incorporating collaborative improvisations that respond to the subject in both form and content. By this use of archival traces as both an input and a point of departure for her own creative work, Petts opens up new possibilities for multiple audiences to engage with the archive—not simply as a source of information but also, to borrow Raymond Williams's wonderfully evocative phrase, as a “structure of feeling” that allows audiences access to the archive on an affective register (Williams 1977).

Petts had made a poetic film, *Throw Them Up & Let Them Sing* (2012), on Kurt Schwitters's WWII-era exile from Nazi Germany, first to Norway and then to the Lake District in Cumbria where he created the *Elterwater Merz Barn*—his fourth and last Merz structure. It exemplified the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“total work of art”) and was based on an expanded idea of collage, where Schwitters incorporated found objects (in the Lake District this included flowers, branches, and stones) in the construction of the walls of a barn and painted over them to give this three-dimensional collage an abstract quality. In this film she treated the landscape Schwitters was attracted to as a full-fledged character. Li's journey to another part of Cumbria was, in many ways, parallel to that of Schwitters. Li too was a migrant of conflict attracted to the Cumbrian countryside as a place to build his own *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

A prosaic but no less strategic motivation to invite Petts was her appetite for devouring archives. Given the quantum of uncatalogued, and most likely unwatched, visual and audio material present in the LYC archive, the invitation to Petts was also in the spirit of collaborative research and a way of engaging with the archive that budgets and capacities would best allow. Petts's resulting film, *Space & Freedom* (2018), the only newly commissioned work for *Speech Acts*, lived up to those expectations and can be seen as a companion piece to her earlier film on Schwitters. *Space & Freedom* takes its name from the qualities Li was looking for in moving to Cumbria and makes use of voice recordings of Li describing elements of his vision for the LYC Museum. These sound recordings were hiding in plain sight on reel-to-reel tapes in the John Rylands Library, and Petts was possibly the first person to have had heard the tapes since Li recorded them in the early 1970s. The extract Petts uses in her film literally give voice to Li's ideas for the LYC; in it, he articulates a vision he obviously felt compelled to record for posterity. His narration was originally recorded over a BBC music program that had not been completely erased by the over-recording—the layering of sound functioning, as Petts points out, “like pentimenti in painting” (Nasar 2018).

Petts makes a feature of the scratchy nature of this sound and invited the musician Steve Beresford to punctuate her film with improvisations from prepared pieces for piano. She combines these sounds with previously digitized video shot by Li on an 8-millimeter camera and film she shot on location at LYC and its environs. The film thus becomes a collective exploration of the rhythms, textures, sights, and sounds of the Cumbrian landscape that inspired Li. By toggling back and forth between archival footage in black and white and contemporary footage in color, Petts allows us to enter the space and place of the LYC at two different times more than four decades apart.

Space & Freedom anchors the LYC in nature. Birds chirp, tweet, and sing; water burbles and gushes; the southing wind accompanies us on rambles through the trees. The artist David Nash called the LYC “an oasis of how life and art could be,” and likened it to “a growing plant” in being “vulnerable yet determined” (Nash 2000, 139). *Space & Freedom* allows us a glimpse into this plant-like oasis, with its capacity to spark creative thought that persisted for Li even after the LYC's closure, when its garden became the stage for his experimentation with photography and, as shown in one segment of the archival clip, animation. Li mined the performative possibilities offered by temporary arrangements of

everyday objects (blocks of wood, a ball, an umbrella, and hedge shears) and his own body to produce a lyrical body of work tinged with a melancholic beauty.

Petts's work sutures the wounds of forgetting. I read her careful examination and clinical selection of the archival remains of Li's vision, most directly expressed in his digitized 8-millimeter films and sound recordings, and centering them in her own film, as an exercise in care toward a legacy that has been neglected in art historical accounts.

Bureaucracy, Protocols, and the Violence of "Simple Stories"

During 2017–2018, while researching *Speech Acts*, I was struck by an anomaly in how the United Kingdom's largest database of works in public collections, Art UK, recorded the nationality of certain artists on its website.¹⁵ For instance, Lucian Freud (1922–2011) was classified as "British, English, German"; Francis Bacon (1909–1992) as "British, English"; Kim Lim (1936–1997) as "British"; and Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928–1985) as "Pakistani." All four were born elsewhere (Germany, Ireland, Singapore, and Pakistan), reached their artistic maturity in the United Kingdom, and were British citizens.

I noted this difference in national affiliation, and pointed out Shemza's lack of even a hyphen (as in "Pakistani-British") in a BBC Four television documentary, on the making of *Speech Acts* (2018–2019).¹⁶ Shortly after the airing of that program I was invited by the Art UK team to address this issue in a short text for their website (see Nasar 2019b). During our conversation I understood that the Union List of Artist Names (ULAN) database managed by The Getty Research Institute, that populated the nationality field in Art UK, had no mechanism for changing individual records. The discrepancies I pointed out prompted the Art UK team to investigate the tiny acts of seemingly neutral bureaucracy through which artists were shown as various versions of "British" on their website. In instances of contestation, they effected a workaround—removing ULAN's nationality data entirely from the artists' profiles. A more recent visit to Art UK's website shows Lucian Freud's multiple allegiances unchanged, and Kim Lim is still simply "British"; but Bacon and Shemza, have lost all markers of national identity.

Databases are not innocent. For instance, the artists Peter Doig ("British, English, Scottish, Canadian") and David Hockney ("British, English"), despite living most of their professional lives elsewhere, in Trinidad and Los Angeles respectively, do not have their life choices reflected in how they are identified on Art UK. While Li Yuan-chia, also the holder of a British passport and buried in Lanercost Priory in 1994 after spending nearly three decades of his life in the UK, is introduced as a "Chinese artist" on the websites of both John Rylands and Art UK—a designation that has questionable meaning outside ethnic identity, as Li left mainland China in 1949 as a twenty-year-old. These seemingly insignificant acts of bureaucracy both reflect and shape what constitutes "British art" in our museums and academies, and through knowledge sharing platforms such as Art UK. The histories so produced reinforce narrow, and often racist, national narratives. They also raise a much larger question: What constitutes British art history, or indeed British history? These questions become even more significant once we move beyond narrower art-specific platforms to the carriers of mainstream culture such as the world-renowned UK public broadcaster, the BBC.

The BBC Four documentary, *Whoever Heard of a Black Artist? Britain's Hidden Art History*, followed Boyce's BAM project in the lead up to *Speech Acts* and was broadcast in July 2018, a few weeks after its opening. I do not have the time and space here for a fulsome critique of its failure to make a meaningful intervention in prevailing discourse, so I will confine my comments to what I see as the main issue in its coverage of *Speech Acts*. To the point: the dialogue that the exhibition was trying to open, between works framed through difference and the established canon in British art history, was not even hinted at in the

documentary. The BBC showed the works of Rasheed Araeen, Sutapa Biswas, Kim Lim, Anwar Jalal Shemza, and Aubrey Williams in isolation and not, as arranged in the exhibition, in a critical dialogue with works by artists that make up the all-white and mostly male canon of British modernism; for instance, showing the work of Araeen with that of Gilbert & George; that of Williams with that of Alan Davie; or those of Lim and Shemza with those of Eduardo Paolozzi and Bridget Riley. These were propositional juxtapositions with an ambition to question the established genealogies of artistic categories such as geometric abstraction, or the hierarchies between design and fine art. But these ideas were simply ignored by the BBC.

In my personal view, the BBC documentary ran against the grain of the BAM project's aim to foreground the work of art itself, rather than the identity of its maker. Instead of expanding and complicating narratives, the BBC delivered a racially defined story—one that did not find the space to even credit my co-curator, Kate Jesson, who remained an unnamed presence flitting across the screen during a sequence showing the exhibition being installed. Nor was there any space for featuring Helen Petts and her new commission for the exhibition, *Space & Freedom*—which, as noted here, made valuable new contributions to our understanding of Li and his ambitions for the LYC Museum. We live in complex times, and in the BBC's paternalistic search for simplicity in telling our entangled and difficult cultural histories lurks a form of violence. Depressingly, such is the reach and structural power of the BBC, that this program, with all its limitations, is possibly the single most significant archival trace of the *Speech Acts* exhibition in the cultural sphere; underlining the challenge of overcoming sticky narratives of national identity.

Exhibitions as Sites of Resurrection and Exercises in Co-Habitation

Nicholas Tee's *Yellow Peril* (2019) was one of three performances curated by Annie Jaël Kwan as a response to the exhibition *Speech Acts*. *Yellow Peril* was staged to launch a symposium organized as part of the public program accompanying the exhibition at Manchester Art Gallery.¹⁷ One inspiration for the performance was Do Ho Suh's print *Who Am We?* (2000), exhibited in *Speech Acts*; the work's title, a literal translation from Do's native Korean, captures the tension between individual and collective identity. A shirtless Tee began his performance by sitting on an upturned bucket behind a large magnifying sheet—a mirroring of how audiences were invited to view the hundreds of tiny individual portraits from Do's high school yearbook that constituted the print. While seated, Tee applied gold leaf to his face in an obvious homage to the pioneering Singapore artist Lee Wen's (1957–2019) iconic exploration of cultural stereotypes in *Journey of a Yellow Man* (1992–2012)—which was first performed in London. The gesture lent added poignancy by the fact that Lee had died in Singapore a few days before Tee's performance.

In her contribution to *British Art Studies*, Kwan walks us through every stage of the *Yellow Peril* performance, sensitively unpacking the multifarious references contained within it as it crosses multiple national histories of art, and teeters at the edge of institutional discomfort (see Kwan 2019). In her analysis, Kwan draws a comparison between Singapore's de facto ban of performance art and unscripted theater in 1994 and Manchester Art Gallery's rejection of Tee's initial proposal, which involved cutting his body, out of a worry for being seen to condone self-harm, an increasing concern among young people in Manchester.

Performance art has historically been associated with the capacity to puncture social space, to activate it and make us feel the discomforts and inconvenient truths we hide from our social relations and within ourselves. Transgressive acts have routinely been canonized in the history of performance art—the works of Marina Abramović, Franko B., and Ron Athey come readily to mind—but performance art's twenty-first century popularity has in

many cases obscured this capacity for discomfort. Performances—by definition more anodyne and less confrontational—now routinely feature in art fairs and launch gala dinners (or, as for *Speech Acts*, symposia).

Faced with the institutional neutering of his initial proposal, Nicholas Tee proceeded through the strategic and tiered withholding of his full plans, shielding the undisciplined edge of his performance from the flattening regimes of display and behavior that museums, as public spaces, end up policing. He ended his performance seemingly as had been agreed, by walking through the exhibition and out of the Manchester Art Gallery.¹⁸ Upon reaching the street he carved out the words “Bloody Foreigner” on his own skin as recorded by Annie Kwan. The act was not announced ahead of time, but was half anticipated by myself and Jesson, the curators of the *Speech Acts* exhibition, and agreed between Tee and Kwan as the finale of his performance.

This, however, was *not* how Tee finished. After the cutting, he went quietly rogue. He re-entered the gallery and, as an unrehearsed climax for his performance, pressed his body onto the wall, leaving a bloody mark at the entrance of the exhibition. This unexpected coda blindsided Kwan, whose slightly fuzzy photographs of these late surreptitious stages are suggestive of the conflicted impulses she must have felt at this departure in relation to what she had agreed with the artist. In the short time before Kwan cleaned these unruly traces from the gallery walls, the crimson marks of Tee’s blood were reflected in the different shades of red in two works in the exhibition: Li’s *Untitled* (1994) and Araeen’s *Christmas Day* (1997). Together these red accents formed a brief but intense intergenerational visual conversation evoking the anger, melancholy, resignation, resilience, and defiance germane to the immigrant experience. Lent contextual heft by the casual xenophobia in Britain released by the Brexit vote between 2016 and 2019, the performance took on new cadences in relation to the public hostility experienced by many people with visibly East Asian heritage after the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. Given the connection many populist white politicians were opportunistically making between the virus and its possible origins in China, *Yellow Peril* acquired a potent new meaning.

In his publication *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* (2009), the Lebanese artist and thinker Jalal Toufic suggests that in the exceptional occurrence of a type of event that he calls a “surpassing disaster” (his text considers the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima as addressed in the Alain Resnais’ 1959 film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*), certain cultural works (visual art, films, books) suffer from an “immaterial withdrawal” and become unavailable to artists, writers and sensitive creative practitioners (Toufic 2009). In my contribution to the catalogue accompanying a landmark exhibition, *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945–65* at London’s Barbican Centre (2022), I deploy Toufic’s proposition of immaterial withdrawal to engage with the question of why certain works of art resist canonization (Nasar 2022, 27). Toufic posits that the artists and writers—one could add curators and art historians to this list—living through a surpassing disaster develop their practices as if these “immaterially withdrawn” works do not exist. As a result any aesthetic, formal or conceptual innovation in their realization—in fact all forms of knowledge inherent to them—cannot be grasped by these creative practitioners. He suggests that for these “withdrawn” works to become “available” again, they need to be “resurrected”: through restaging, re-performance, or remaking.

In my reading, Britain’s loss of Empire in the aftermath of WWII meets Toufic’s characteristics of a surpassing disaster. This subsequently made the artistic contributions of artists like Li Yuan-chia, who came to Britain to make their lives and careers, “unavailable” to most who wrote on, studied, curated, and considered the histories of art in Britain. This is a fate Li shares with numerous artists who came to Britain in the middle of the twentieth century and explains why many chose to leave for brighter shores when the 1960s refused to swing for them.¹⁹ This is not to ignore, or in any way excuse, the structural racism at play here. Nor is it to downplay what theorist and filmmaker Kodwo Eshun has called the “marginal,

provisional, and above all encumbered” nature of modernism in Britain that had persuaded Piet Mondrian, Walter Gropius, and László Moholy-Nagy to keep their British sojourn short before they too left for American shores.²⁰ But Toufic’s concept offers an explanation for how more recent exhibitions and scholarly publications exploring this period in British art history continue to ignore the contributions of Li Yuan-chia and other artists from the diaspora, even in our supposedly more enlightened times.²¹

Toufic’s ideas also make a powerful argument for considering exhibitions as “remakes”—an archival engagement with the past that opens up its multiple possibilities. I have previously written about the exhibition *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (2012) at Tate Britain, London as being “haunted” by Araeen’s exhibition *The Other Story* (Nasar 2015). I now consider it to be more generative to consider *Migrations* as a partial remake—an effort at making significant historical works from many of the artists in *The Other Story* “available” again. I am tempted to read *Migrations* as an archive in itself; and by extension I would argue that the sequence of *Migrations* (2012), *Speech Acts* (2018–2019), and the Barbican’s *Postwar Modern* (2022) fits into a broader trajectory of remakes, with an accumulative impact in refashioning existing art historical narratives through making “immaterially withdrawn” works “available.” The “resurrection” of works by Li Yuan-chia, for instance, is feeding multiple and diverse dialogues: the Whitworth Gallery presented a display of his hand-tinted photographs (2019–2020);²² the artist Haegue Yang displayed a series of works by Li, Barbara Hepworth, and Naum Gabo as a prologue to her solo exhibition at Tate St. Ives (2020–2021);²³ the Whitechapel’s exhibition, *A Century of the Artist’s Studio* (2022), displayed a remake of Li’s kitchen cabinet from the LYC Museum—containing a selection of his magnetic points and a video projecting an image of Li’s utopian spherical studio—alongside a reconstruction of Kurt Schwitters’s *Merzbau* and Martha Rosler’s *Semiotics of the Kitchen*,²⁴ also in 2022, Li’s work was included in Tate Liverpool’s radical update of the British landscape in art;²⁵ and in 2023, Cambridge University’s Kettle’s Yard will host the exhibition *Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia and Friends*—which I am co-curating with Amy Tobin and Sarah Victoria Turner—putting Li, the LYC and the friendships that nurtured it, in conversation with the much-storied narratives of Kettle’s Yard, firmly ensconced in the histories of British art. We are organizing this exhibition in dialogue with numerous artists, scholars, and institutions who have been inspired by Li’s work or are working in his spirit.

As quoted earlier, Guy Brett had complained of the lack of “instruments fine enough to detect a journey such as his [Li’s] ... crossing geographical and cultural boundaries but also those of the concepts and practices of art” (Brett 2000, 11). In working toward the *Making New Worlds* exhibition we are testing a hypothesis that it is not new instruments we need for reparative art history writing but distributed, collaborative and propositional ways of working. Ways wherein the archive is not reduced to functioning as a repository of facts, but can fuel a multiplicity of practices—research, pedagogical, artistic, and curatorial—that find different forms. *Making New Worlds* makes the case for the archivally informed exhibition as a platform capacious enough to allow entangled histories to be acknowledged and explored. It is an argument to treat the exhibition as shape-shifting infrastructure—fed by and feeding the archive—but remaining a site of encounter, discovery, and possibility.

Notes

- 1 Curating Nation is a project conceived by myself and developed at UAL’s Decolonising Arts Institute (2020–2022). “What stories of British art travel?” (April 28, 2021) was the subject of the second of three public seminars convened by me in collaboration with the British Art Network’s Black British Art Research Group led by Alice Correia, Elizabeth Robles, and Marlene Smith; see <https://britishartnetwork.org.uk/activity/seminar-series/curating-nation>, accessed on August 8, 2022.

- 2 Tate is a network of four art galleries in London (Tate Britain and Tate Modern), Liverpool (Tate Liverpool) and Cornwall (Tate St. Ives) that houses the United Kingdom's national collection of British art from 1500 to the present day and international modern and contemporary art.
- 3 The Turner Prize is organized by Tate every year and awards British artists making an outstanding contribution to contemporary art; see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/turner-prize>, accessed on May 22, 2023. British Art Show is organized every five years by Hayward Gallery Touring to bring the work of artists defining new directions in contemporary art to four cities across the UK; see https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/touring-programme/hayward-gallery-touring/exhibitions/british-art-show?gclid=Cj0KCQjwz8emBhDrARIsANNJjs6DPRNhqubvr5oAhM7STl9VvRgwvJx0U7xtG6QF8yxKN8KimhxITfIaAnDuEALw_wcB, accessed on May 22, 2023.
- 4 *British Art Show 9* (2021–2022) curated by Irene Aristizàbal and me, showcased the work of forty-seven artists engaging with three overarching themes: “care, healing and reparative history,” “tactics for togetherness,” and “imagining new futures.”
- 5 *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Postwar Britain* was held at Hayward Gallery, London (November 1989 to February 1990) before touring to Wolverhampton Art Gallery (March to April 1990) and Manchester City Art Gallery and Cornerhouse in Manchester (May to June 1990).
- 6 *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (January to August 2012) at Tate Britain was curated by Lizzie Carey-Thomas with Tim Batchelor, Emma Chambers, Leyla Fakhr, Paul Goodwin, and Karen Hearn, with the support of Lena Mohamed.
- 7 For more on London, Asia, see <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/research/london-asia>, accessed on May 22, 2023.
- 8 The Black Artists and Modernism (BAM) research project was led by artist Sonia Boyce, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK (AHRC) and developed by University of the Arts London in collaboration with Middlesex University. For more on BAM, see <http://www.blackartistsmodernism.co.uk/about>, accessed on May 22, 2023.
- 9 The four collections were Cartwright Hall (Bradford); and John Rylands Library, Manchester Art Gallery, and The Whitworth (Manchester). A PDF of the gallery guide for *Speech Acts* is available at: <https://manchesterartgallery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/BAM-Speech-Acts-Guide14.pdf>, accessed on May 22, 2023.
- 10 These objectives are articulated in a set of principles for the London, Asia project and are accessible at: <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/research/london-asia-description>, accessed on May 22, 2023.
- 11 For a wide-ranging discussion on the instability of the art historical canon vis a vis contemporary artistic practice, hear Tate Modern Director Frances Morris in conversation with artists and curators on the BBC Radio 3 documentary, “Exploding the Canon,” first broadcast on 25 October 2022; see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08wbx4w>, accessed on May 22, 2023.
- 12 *Li Yuan-chia: tell me what is not yet said* (2001), curated by Guy Brett, was organized by Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) at the Camden Arts Centre, London; it travelled to Abbot Hall Art Gallery and Museum, Kendal; and Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. *Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-chia* (2012), was curated by Guy Brett and Nick Sawyer and organized by the Taipei Fine Art Museum. Catalogues were published for both exhibitions.
- 13 Li had three solo exhibitions and participated in three group shows at the Lisson Gallery, London, between 1967 and 1970.
- 14 For more on the LYC Museum see <http://www.lycfoundation.org/li-yuan-chia/lyc-museum>, accessed on May 22, 2023.
- 15 Art UK is a charity committed to improving access to the art in public collections primarily through digital publishing; see <https://artuk.org/about/about>, accessed on August 8, 2022.

- 16 The making of the exhibition *Speech Acts: Reflection-Imagination-Repetition* and the wider Black Artists and Modernism research was the subject of a BBC Four documentary—*Whoever Heard of a Black Artist? Britain's Hidden Art History*—first broadcast on 30 July 2018; see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bcy4kd>, accessed on May 22, 2023.
- 17 “The LYC Museum & Art Gallery and the Museum as Practice” was convened by myself, Lucy Steeds, and Sarah Victoria Turner and organized by Manchester Art Gallery, Paul Mellon Centre, University of the Arts London and the University of Manchester on March 6, 2019. As part of its accompanying program, Annie Jael Kwan of the research network Asia-Art-Activism curated *Being Present*, a set of performances by Ada Hao, Bettina Fung, and Nicholas Tee.
- 18 A timeline of photographs of *Yellow Peril* with invited annotations from myself, Ming Tiampo, and Sarah Victoria Turner can be accessed at Nicholas Tee, “Yellow Peril,” *British Art Studies*, Issue 13 (DATE), <https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-13/ntee>.
- 19 “When the Sixties Didn’t Swing” was a panel discussion I helped organize at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in September 2010 to consider the legacy of artists of Asian and African heritage active in 1960s London who have largely been ignored in British art history. Several of these artists—including Frank Bowling, Avinash Chandra, Francis Newton Souza, and Aubrey Williams—left the United Kingdom in the 1960s.
- 20 Kodwo Eshun, edited text of an interview with Lizzie Carey-Thomas and Paul Goodwin, further revised by Eshun (2012, 109).
- 21 Notable examples of this continued exclusion include: the exhibition, *Conceptual Art in Britain, 1964–79* (2016), curated by Andrew Wilson at Tate Britain, London, not featuring the work of Rasheed Araeen, David Medalla, or Li Yuan-chia; and Lisa Tickner’s (2020) scholarly publication devoting one paragraph of its 400-plus pages to Signals Gallery while agreeing with and quoting Guy Brett’s charge that the contribution of Signals and its network of artists have been “overlooked or marginalized”; see 80–81.
- 22 *Li Yuan-chia: Unique Photographs* (2019–2020) curated by Mary Griffiths at The Whitworth, Manchester.
- 23 *Haegue Yang: Strange Attractors* (2020–2021), curated by Anne Barlow at Tate St. Ives.
- 24 The remake of Li’s kitchen cabinet and the video of his model studio is the work of artist Aaron Tan for *A Century of the Artist’s Studio 1920–2020* (2022), curated by Iwona Blazwick with Dawn Ades, Inês Costa, Richard Dyer, Hammad Nasar, and Candy Stubbs at Whitechapel Gallery, London.
- 25 *Radical Landscapes* (2022), curated by Darren Pih and Laura Bruni at Tate Liverpool.

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